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LAIS

by Hilda Doolittle
American Poetry 1922

Let her who walks in Paphos
take the glass,
let Paphos take the mirror
and the work of frosted fruit,
gold apples set
with silver apple-leaf,
white leaf of silver
wrought with vein of gilt.

Let Paphos lift the mirror;
let her look
into the polished center of the disk.

Let Paphos take the mirror:
did she press
flowerlet of flame-flower
to the lustrous white
of the white forehead?
did the dark veins beat
a deeper purple
than the wine-deep tint
of the dark flower?

Did she deck black hair,
one evening, with the winter-white
flower of the winter-berry?

Did she look (reft of her lover)

at a face gone white
under the chaplet
of white virgin-breath?

Lais, exultant, tyrannizing Greece,
Lais who kept her lovers in the porch,
lover on lover waiting
(but to creep
where the robe brushed the threshold
where still sleeps Lais),
so she creeps, Lais,
to lay her mirror at the feet
of her who reigns in Paphos.

Lais has left her mirror,
for she sees no longer in its depth
the Lais' self
that laughed exultant,
tyrannizing Greece.

Lais has left her mirror,
for she weeps no longer,
finding in its depth
a face, but other
than dark flame and white
feature of perfect marble.

Lais has left her mirror
(so one wrote)
to her who reigns in Paphos;

Lais who laughed a tyrant over Greece,
Lais who turned the lovers from the porch,
that swarm for whom now
Lais has no use;
Lais is now no lover of the glass,
seeing no more the face as once it was,
wishing to see that face and finding this.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOAN

By Mary E. Wilkins Freeman
from Harper's Magazine, Dec 1919

"MY!" "Don't you think I've done pretty well?"

"Sarah Bannister, you know as well as I do, it is wonderful!"

The two women stood in the best parlor, a long room, furnished with aggressive plush and mahogany, and onyx tables, and a marble Clytie drooping her head impudently in her out-of-place state in a New England parlor. The room was chilly in spite of the radiators, glaring with gilt in the most conspicuous wall spaces. Every piece of furniture—old-fashioned square tables, sofa, chairs, and piano—was covered with dainty things, large and small, of all colors and fabrics.

"To think you made everything here with your own hands!" commented Miss Lottie Dodd. She was a distant relative of Mrs. Bannister's, who lived with her a month at a time.

"Yes, and the worst of it is, it isn't quite a week to Christmas, and I haven't got the things done yet."

"Land! I should think you had enough here for the whole town."

"I'm giving to about the whole town this year. Then, you know all our cousins out West, and the raft of relations we never see except at our funerals, that live in Watchboro, and Center Watchboro, and South and North and East."

"I didn't know you remembered them Christmas."

"I don't every year, but this time I was so forehanded I thought I'd put them in with the rest."

"You don't mean to say you are remembering all the Rice family?"

"Yes, I am."

"Not all those children?"

"Oh, I've got the children's presents all ready; it's the older folks' I haven't got done. I have planned a lot of drawn work."

"You do that so beautifully," said Lottie. She was a tiny woman snuggled in a lavender wool shawl. The tip of her sharp nose was red. Her blue eyes were tearful, from cold and enthusiasm. Lottie was prey to enthusiasms, even petty ones.

"I've got a lot more to do. I sha'n't try any different patterns from these here; the same with the knitted lace. That will make it easier."

Sarah Bannister clipped the last word short with a sneeze.

"Sarah, you are catching cold in this room."

"Don't know but I am. It never will heat when the wind's northwest. It's bitter outdoors to-day, too. The snow hasn't melted one mite. Look at those windows all frosted up."

"Well, Sarah, we better be going back to the sitting-room, where it's warm."

"Guess we'd better. I was going to look a little longer. I don't seem to see some things I know I've got. I do feel some as if I were catching cold. Hope to goodness I don't—just before Christmas, too. I'll get Henry to bring in some wood for the sitting-room hearth fire."

"I sort of wonder sometimes why you and Henry don't keep a man to fetch and carry," said Lottie Dodd, as the two entered the sitting-room, meeting a gust of warm air, scented with geranium and heliotrope from the window plants. "Henry is quite some older than you, and it's beginning to show."

"Oh, Henry's perfectly able to do what little chores we have. Men want some exercise."

They sat down. Sarah Bannister began to crochet, a neatly rolled-up ball of finished lace bobbing as her fingers moved. Lottie worked laboriously on a blue centerpiece.

"It certainly is lucky you are so well off, Sarah."

"Yes, I realize it is. Henry never saved much, but I have enough for both, thanks to poor father. I never spend a cent but I think of him. He used to talk so much to me about not being extravagant."

"Oh, Sarah, as if anybody could accuse you of that!"

Sarah started, but she continued talking. "Poor father used to say—I remember as if it were yesterday—'Sarah, it's easy enough to get money, for those who have the right kind of heads, and work, but it takes more than heads to keep it. That's a gift.'"

Lottie Dodd, impecunious, who had never benefited much from Sarah's riches, except in the somewhat negative way of food and cast-off clothing, looked reflectively at the large, flat, rather handsome face.

Sarah stared sharply at Lottie, who did not speak. Silence and immobility make a fool inscrutable.

Sarah suspected. "Now, you wouldn't believe, Lottie Dodd, how little some of these things in there"—she shrugged her shoulders toward the parlor—"cost."

"You don't mean it." Lottie's voice was as blatantly innocent as a lamb's.

"Yes, I bought a lot at the Five- and Ten-cent stores, and I had nice pieces of silk and satin and lace, and I mixed them in, and you'd never know. I thought of poor father every minute I was in these Five- and Ten-cent stores."

"They would have just suited your dear pa."

Again the look of suspicion was in Sarah's eyes, to disappear before the other woman's innocent expression. Then the door-bell rang with a loud clang.

"Sakes alive! Whoever can that be, such a cold afternoon?" said Mrs. Bannister.

"Maybe it's a peddler."

"Well, if it is, he vamooses. I never will allow a peddler in my house."

Sarah Bannister sneezed three times. "Let me go to the door," said Lottie Dodd. "You have caught cold, sure as fate. Let me go, dear."

In Lottie's voice was the faint, very faint inflection in which she betrayed her consciousness that she was a year and a half younger than Sarah. To Lottie that meant, when she so desired, the feebleness of age for Sarah, juvenile agility for herself.

Sarah recognized that inflection. "I rather guess I'm as able to go to the door as you," she retorted. She thrust her face almost into the other's in a way she had when irritated.

"It was only on account of your cold, dear," protested Lottie, shrinking back.

"I haven't got any cold. If you're trying to wish one on me, you can just stop. Sneezing don't prove you've got a cold. Tim!"

"Why, Sarah!"

Sarah stepped majestically doorward as the bell rang again. She walked on her heels as she had a trick of doing when feeling unusually self-sufficient. Lottie peeked around the curtain over the pots of geranium, but she could see nothing. She could hear voices, and the wind came in the cracks of the sitting-room door. The front door closed with a bang, and Lottie darted back to her chair. She expected to see Mrs. Bannister enter irate after turning away a peddler, but after Sarah entered a young girl, hardly more than a child.

"Go right to that hearth fire and sit down and get warm through," ordered Mrs. Bannister. She spoke in a stern voice, but her speech ended in a beautiful cadence. When the child was seated before the fire, which Sarah stirred to a higher blaze and piled with more wood, she gazed at the young face reflecting

the red glow, and smiled in a way that made Lottie gaze wonderingly at her, and suddenly remember that years ago, so many years that she had forgotten, Sarah Bannister had lost a daughter about the age of this girl. Meantime Sarah Bannister was removing the girl's extraordinarily shabby hat, and pulling off gently her shabbier coat. The girl resisted the last a little, and her small, timid voice murmured something about her dress.

"Never mind your dress," said Sarah. "You will get warmer with these off."

As she spoke she laid the coat and hat on a chair, rather gingerly. Such rags as the coat disclosed, such rags of a red silk lining, and such a sinfully draggled feather decked the old hat. Sarah turned to look at the girl. Lottie was looking. Lottie had her mouth slightly open. Sarah gasped. The girl sitting there, meekly, almost limply, was a darling of a girl (judging from her little face). It was very pale now, but with the velvety pallor of a white flower. Her hair lay in soft rings of gold shading into brown about her small head. She wore her hair short, and it made her seem more a child. Her dress was torn about the sleeves and gaped where hooks were missing, unless pinned with obvious pins. Her little hands were stiff and red, and one continued to clasp cautiously the handle of an unspeakably shabby old bag. Suddenly she looked up, first at one, then at the other of the faces regarding her. She looked with perfect composure, so perfect that it directly made her seem older. Her great blue eyes had a womanly wise cognizance of the two women.

"How old are you?" demanded Sarah Bannister, suddenly.

"Thirteen last May," replied the girl. Her voice was charming, with a curious appeal in it. She seemed to be begging pardon for the fact that she was thirteen last May.

Sarah Bannister, her face working as if she were about to weep, went to a little china-closet, and presently came back with a glass of home-made wine, and a square of sponge cake on a pink plate.

"Here, drink this and eat this cake," said she. "It will do you good."

She set a small table beside the girl and placed the wine-glass and the cake on it.

"Thank you, ma'am," said the girl. She began to eat and drink rather eagerly. She was evidently famished, but very gentle about it. She still retained her hold of the bag.

Lottie spoke for the first time. "What have you got in that bag?" said she, rather sharply. The girl flashed her blue eyes at her in a frightened but defiant way.

"Things to sell," she whispered.

Lottie looked at Sarah. So she was a peddler, after all. Sarah did not return Lottie's glance. She spoke to the girl.

"When you have finished your cake and wine, and get real warm, I will look at the things you have to sell," said she, softly.

"Thank you, ma'am."

Lottie began to be aggressive. "What is your name?" she asked, peremptorily.

"Don't speak so sharp, Lottie," said Sarah. "You will scare her half to death. She's nothing but a child. She was half frozen. She was standing there on the door-step, shaking from head to foot, poor little thing, half dressed, too, on such a day as this." Sarah glanced at the heap of wool and red silk rags on the chair, and remembered a nice thick wool coat in the closet of a certain chamber.

Lottie asked again, but more gently, "What is your name, little girl?"

"Joan Brooks."

"Oh, I know her," said Lottie, with an accent of slight scorn. "Her father's that broken-down minister. He fills the pulpit sometimes when Mr. Whitman has bronchitis."

"He preaches very well, too," said Sarah, kindly.

"Father is not broken down. He stands up as well as you do," said Joan, unexpectedly. Then she began to rise. "Where is my coat?" said she.

"You sit right down, child," said Sarah. "She didn't mean a thing. Of course your father isn't broken down. We always speak that way of a minister who don't preach regularly."

"Father used to preach regularly," said the girl, eagerly, "but after we moved here the church he came to preach in burned down."

"That was the little Hyde's Corner church," interpolated Lottie. Sarah nodded.

"He preached regularly there," stated Joan, "until the fire."

"What does your father do now?" asked Lottie.

"He preaches for other ministers a great deal, and between whiles he goes about taking orders for a beautiful book on the Holy Land."

Lottie looked at the geraniums, and her lips moved inaudibly, "Peddler."

"We don't have as much money as we did before the fire," stated the little girl, "and we don't have much of anything to give away. That is why—" She stopped.

Sarah caught up the bag, which Joan had placed on the floor beside her.

"Well, let us see what you have to sell," said she.

Sarah opened the bag and Lottie stood looking over her shoulder.

"My!" said Lottie, "what lovely drawnwork, and it's just the same pattern as that bureau-scarf you made for your cousin Lizzie, too!"

"And I wanted one like it for her married sister, Jennie. How much is this, Joan?"

Joan mentioned a price. Lottie paled, and her mouth dropped when Sarah Bannister, so careful of money, said she would take it. She also bought for a large sum a beautiful table-cloth with embroidered corners for the minister's wife.

"That's just like the one you made yourself for Mrs. Lester Sears," said Lottie. She thought Sarah Bannister must be losing her wits. "There's that same cornucopia in one corner, and cluster of daisies in another," she mentioned, feebly.

"I know it," said Sarah, defiantly. "Why shouldn't it be the same? It's a common pattern. I made that table-cloth for Mrs. Sears because she was so good when I was sick with the grippe, sending in things 'most every day. I wanted to make something for the minister's wife just as nice, because she and Annie Sears are so thick, and because we all know the minister isn't very popular, and I feel sort of sorry for her, but I didn't have the time or strength to make it. This is a real godsend."

"You'll have to tell her you didn't make it," remarked Lottie, maliciously.

"I am not in the habit of either telling or implying a lie," replied Mrs. Bannister. Then she turned suddenly to Joan. "My dear, who made these pretty things?"

Joan crimsoned, then paled, but she lifted clear eyes of truth to Mrs. Bannister, "A lady."

"What lady?"

"A lady."

"But what is the lady's name?"

"I would rather not tell her name."

Sarah looked at Lottie and spoke with lip-motion. "Her mother."

Even skeptical Lottie nodded. What so likely as that the broken-down minister's wife might do this exquisite work, and send her little daughter out to sell it?

Sarah was examining the table-cloth. "I am sure it is a little different from mine," she reflected. "The bunch of daisies is larger."

Lottie nodded. "Looks so to me."

Sarah laid down the table-cloth and took up some knitted lace. "This is almost exactly the pattern of mine, and I did want to knit some for Daisy Hapgood. I am so glad to get this."

The more Sarah Bannister bought, the more the little girl's face beamed. Her cheeks flushed, her blue eyes gleamed. Sarah kept gazing at her with loving admiration. As she bought everything in the bag, Joan seemed fairly quivering with delight. She held her pretty upper lip caught between her teeth, lest she break into sheer laughter.

"I will take this handkerchief with the embroidered G," said Sarah. "It is just what I wanted to tuck in a letter to Ella Giddings."

"I thought I saw one in the parlor just like that," said Lottie.

"So you did, similar. Mine has a queer little quirk at the top of the G, and that is for Emma Gleason. I wanted to make another for Ella. Lottie, do you mind going up-stairs and bringing down my little black silk shopping-bag? My purse is in it. I don't want to go through that cold hall. I have got the grippe, I almost know it," said Sarah, when the bag was empty.

While Lottie was gone, Mrs. Bannister and the girl added up items rapidly on the back of an old envelope. Sarah was economical with paper. Sarah added with zeal, and her hand was over the sum total, and she had time to shake her head with finger on lips when the door opened. The girl nodded. She was only a child, but she understood. The other lady was not to know what the things cost.

Lottie cast a sharp glance at the gleam of white paper in Sarah's cautious hand. "Whatever made you hang that bag up in the closet, when you always keep it in the top bureau-drawer?" said she. "I had an awful hunt. Thought I never would find it."

"I remember hanging it there when I hung up my coat when I came home yesterday," replied Sarah, calmly.

Sarah loosened the strings of the bag. Lottie watched like a cat. Sarah took out her nice black leather pocket-book. Lottie craned her neck. Sarah bent over the pocketbook, hiding her proceedings, counted out money, folded it in a nice little roll, and gave it to Joan.

"There," said she, kindly. "That is right. Now you had better run and give it to your mother."

"I shall not take this money to mother," said she. "She will not expect it. It is my money. Father and mother wish me to be independent. I have this money for Christmas presents and I shall have to see to them myself."

Joan rapidly slipped into her ragged coat. Sarah thought of the warm one up-stairs, but did not somehow feel like mentioning it.

"You mean to say you don't tell your mother about this?" said Lottie.

"Mother does not wish me to tell her everything," said Joan. "Father does not, either. They say I should lose my individuality."

"No danger, seems to me," said Lottie. When the girl had gone and was disappearing down the road, a red rag from the silken lining of her coat blowing back stiffly in the icy wind like an anarchist flag, the women stood at the window, watching her.

"She is a darling little girl," remarked Sarah, with an absent air.

Lottie looked at her. Directly there came before her mental vision the freckled face, the long nose, the retreating chin, the weak eyes and stiff, sandy hair of Sarah's departed daughter, long in her little green grave.

"She thinks this beautiful girl looks like her," Lottie reflected.

Directly Sarah spoke in a breaking voice, and tears rolled down her cheeks. "She is the living image of my Ida."

Lottie lied for the sake of her own heart. "Yes, so she is," said she.

"Then you saw the likeness?"

"How could I help it?"

"Want me to take these things into the parlor and put them with the others?" offered Lottie. "You mustn't go in there with such a cold as you've got."

"I'll put them in the secretary, here," said Sarah. "There's one drawer without a thing in it. I want to look them over again, and everything will have to be done up and addressed out here, anyway. Remind me to send to the store for some more Christmas ribbon to-morrow morning."

Sarah folded the dainty things she had bought and laid them carefully away in the secretary drawer, then she seated herself in her rocking-chair and took her pocketbook out of her black silk bag. She looked up and saw Lottie's sharp eyes turn away. She laughed and the laugh had a tang in it.

"Well, Lottie," said she, "if you want so much to know what I paid for the things, I am perfectly willing to tell you, although I cannot imagine why you want to know. I am not in the least curious, myself."

Lottie flushed suddenly. She tried to smile. "I ain't curious," she replied. "I never was. What makes you talk so, Sarah? It sounds sort of hateful."

Sarah paid no attention. "The things cost just twenty-three dollars and seventy-nine cents," said she, coolly.

"My goodness!"

"Yes, just twenty-three dollars and seventy-nine cents."

Very swiftly Lottie sped her own little shaft.

"Why, Sarah Bannister, I never knew, you spent as much on Christmas presents in your whole life. You have never had the name of being as free as all that."

"I didn't deserve it," said Sarah. "All those things made up in the parlor there didn't cost fifteen dollars. I told you they didn't cost so much, and they didn't."

"And you laid out all that money on these things?"

"I didn't have to do the work on these, and the work means a good deal when you are tired out and coming down with the grippe. And, besides"—Sarah hesitated; then she finished with defiant accent—"when I saw that darling little girl, the exact image of my dear lost Ida, I felt almost ready to mortgage the place to buy her out."

"Well, all I can say is, I am beat," remarked Lottie. "If anybody had told me that you would spend twenty-three dollars and seventy-nine cents buying Christmas presents from a peddler, I should say if you did you had gone plumb mad."

"She wasn't a peddler, Lottie. That girl is the daughter of a minister of the Gospel."

"Minister of the Gospel! He ain't preaching. He's peddling books."

Sarah began to speak, but the door-bell cut her short.

"Who in the world is coming now?" she murmured, and smoothed her hair and straightened her apron-strings.

"Another nice peddler, maybe," said Lottie. "Don't put your pocketbook away, Sarah."

Sarah looked at her reproachfully, and coughed. "Will you go to the door?" Lottie went, her head erect. Directly the door was opened Sarah heard a loud, very sweet, very rapid voice, and knew the caller was Mrs. Lee Wilson. Mrs. Wilson danced in ahead of Lottie, who followed her sulkily. She did not like Mrs. Wilson, who was so much prettier than she ought to have been, considering her years, and so much gayer and livelier, that it seemed to give grounds for distrust. Mrs. Wilson slipped back her handsome fur neck-piece, disclosing a deep V of handsome white neck, which Lottie glanced at, then openly sniffed. Then she spoke in a voice which seemed drawn out like thin wire. The voice had hissing sibilations.

"Don't you feel cold, Mrs. Wilson?" said Lottie.

Mrs. Wilson laughed. She understood. "Oh no," said she, sweetly. "I never catch cold with my neck exposed. Don't you think I am lucky to have a neck good enough to keep up with the styles? A woman does look so old-fashioned now, with a high collar."

Lottie flushed. "I care more about decency than I do about style," she snapped. Her animosity was no longer disguised.

Mrs. Wilson laughed again. "Well, it is nice to have a neck long and thin like yours in case the styles changed, and they are bound to, and I look like a freak with a high collar," she said, good-naturedly. "But, Sarah Bannister, and you, too, Lottie, I didn't come here to discuss low necks and high collars. I came here about that Brett family. You remember the talk when the father ran away and left those six children, after the mother died of quick consumption?"

"I thought an aunt came, or something," said Sarah.

"So she did, and stayed quite awhile, and then there was a report that she had gone away and had taken the children. You know at first we thought the town would have to do something about it."

"Didn't the aunt take them away?" asked Lottie.

"Why, no, it seems she didn't. The minister's wife saw the oldest girl—she's a pretty little thing, you know—dragging a small one on a sled yesterday. She said both the children looked well dressed and well nourished, but the eldest girl wouldn't tell her who was looking after them."

"Guess the aunt came back," said Lottie, rather indifferently. Lottie was always indifferent when it came to large families of the poor. It had always vaguely seemed to her like something immoral.

Sarah looked interested. "Why, it seems as if the aunt must have come back," said she, "if they looked as well as you say. How old is the eldest girl?"

"Oh, they are all young. She can't be more than eight, a very pretty child with red-gold hair. They are all shy; won't talk. What I came about—"

Mrs. Wilson hesitated a moment. She colored a little and laughed confusedly. "Well," she said, finally, "I suppose we have all been rather lax about those children. I had a letter from Mrs. S. Walsingham to-day, and how she had heard of the case I don't know, but she had, and—she reminded me very politely, but she reminded me all the same, that she was making an annual donation to the Ladies' Aid Society for just such cases. She said she presumed her letter was useless, for doubtless we had already looked into the case. She knew we hadn't. Somebody in this town has told her."

Lottie nodded her head in a sidewise direction. Mrs. Wilson laughed. "I dare say you are right," she agreed. "Emmeline Jay and her mother are always on the watch ever since they stopped going to church because they thought the minister before this one preached at them all. Well, anyway, Clara Walsingham wants to know, and, of course, she has a right."

"Just like Clara to write that sort of a letter," said Lottie. "Why can't folks come right out? I hate beating round the bush."

Mrs. Wilson giggled. "As for me, there never was a bush handy to beat around. I had to come right out and say my say. Well, the fact is not a woman of the society knows a thing about these Brett children, and who is going to begin? I would, but my little boy is sick, and I suspect measles. I can't carry measles into a poor and deserving family. The minister's wife says she would right away, but her sister with her four children has come to spend Christmas with her, and she has her own three and no help. She says after Christmas she can do anything."

"I'd go to-morrow," said Sarah, reflectively, "but I think I have taken cold, and—it seems selfish, but I must get my presents off. I got rid of working on more, for I bought a lot, but I have a quantity to do up."

The two women looked at Lottie. She sat with her chin high, gazing out of the window.

"Christmas is right here, next week Thursday," remarked Mrs. Wilson, helplessly.

"If my cold is better I will go and see these children to-morrow, presents or no presents," said Sarah, firmly.

Lottie looked over her shoulder at her. "'Twon't be any better. You've got fever now. Look at your cheeks."

As Sarah could not very well look at her own cheeks, and there was no mirror in the room, she gazed at Mrs. Wilson for confirmation.

She nodded. "Your cheeks do look pretty red," said she.

"I'll wait and see how I feel in the morning," she said as Mrs. Wilson rose to go.

In the morning Sarah was no worse and no better. The weather was severe. The wind was very high. Sarah decided to have Lottie bring the presents out from the icy parlor and see if she could not get them ready for mailing during the day.

"By doing that," said she, "I can have to-morrow to go and see those Brett children. Of course, something can be hung on the Sunday-school tree for them, anyway, and it can be seen to that they come, but I don't feel right to wait till after Christmas to do more than that. They may be suffering."

"Guess they're all right," said Lottie. "When there's such a tribe as they, somebody bobs up and looks after them."

Lottie deposited with care her first load of dainty things from the parlor. Sarah, muffled in a white wool shawl, sat out of the draught from the open door. Lottie went back and forth. She laid things on the table, the sofa, on chairs.

"Well, this is all," she said, finally.

"All?"

"Yes, I've brought out everything. You haven't things put away in other places?"

"No, only those I bought from the little girl yesterday. They are in the secretary drawer."

"Sarah Bannister, where is that beautiful embroidered table-cloth that we said was so much like the one you bought?" said Lottie, suddenly. "I don't remember bringing it out. No, don't you go to handling all these cold things. I'll look myself."

Lottie examined everything. Sarah watched. She was rather pale. Finally Lottie came forward and stood before Sarah with a determined air. "That table-cloth ain't here," said she.

"It must be."

"It ain't. When I look I look. It ain't."

Sarah stared at her.

"Some other things ain't here, too," said Lottie.

"What?"

"A lot of doilies, a lot of other things."

Sarah gasped. "Where do you think?"

"Sure you ain't put them away in other places?"

Sarah shook her head.

"Which drawer in the secretary did you put those things you bought from that girl?"

"Lottie!"

"Which drawer?"

"I don't see what you think that has got to do with it."

"Which drawer?"

"Next to the top one," Sarah whispered, feebly.

Lottie crossed the room, her skirts swishing. She returned after two trips and laid the soft piles of dainty handiwork in two chairs before Sarah.

"These ain't cold," said she. "Now let's look over these things. Here's the table-cloth you bought."

"I don't see what you mean."

"Look at it; look real careful."

Sarah took the square of glistening linen, with its graceful embroidery, and examined it. She lingered long over one corner. Her lips tightened. She folded it carefully. "Lay it over on that other chair," said she.

Lottie obeyed. She looked a little frightened.

Sarah went on, examining one article after another. Lottie laid one after another on other chairs.

"There are still four more things missing," said Sarah.

"What?"

"That large centerpiece, really the best thing I had. I meant that for Clara Walsingham. She always sends me such beautiful presents. Then I don't see that blue sweater I knit for the Langham girl—Sally, you know—and I don't see the white Shetland shawl I crocheted for Grandma Langham. That was large and I couldn't fail to see it. And—I don't see the pink bedroom-slippers I made for Cousin Emma's daughter Ruth."

Sarah's voice broke. She passed her handkerchief across her eyes.

"Don't you cry and get all worked up. It will make your fever higher."

"I haven't told you," moaned Sarah, weakly.

"What 'ain't you told me?"

"I haven't told you that the table-cloth I put in the secretary drawer, that I bought from that dear girl, who looks so much like my own daughter who passed away, is the table-cloth I made."

"You sure?"

"Yes, I found the place in the horn-of-plenty where I made a mistake and had to rip out something and work a leaf to hide it."

"Sarah Bannister!"

"I made all the other things I bought, too," said Sarah. "I had ways of telling."

"Are you sure?"

"I wish I wasn't."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know anything I can do."

Lottie, who had not received anything except a high-school education, but was usually rather punctilious about her English, forgot all caution. She sprang into a morass of bad grammar.

"She had ought to be took up!" she said, with decision.

"Lottie, that darling little girl!"

"Darling little limb of Satan!"

"She looked so—"

"If you say another word about her looking like your Ida I shall begin to wonder what your Ida really was. Likening your own flesh and blood to a thief and a liar!"

"Come to think of it, she didn't lie. She wouldn't tell the name of the lady who made the things."

"Oh, well, if she only stole, she ain't quite so bad. I shouldn't wonder," returned Lottie, sarcastically, "if there wan' goin' to be no question of brimstun' for jest plain stealin'."

"Why, Lottie, how you do talk! What has got into you?" Sarah said, weakly. Then she began to weep again.

The door-bell clanged. Lottie ran to the window and peeked.

"It's a man," she whispered. "Wipe your eyes, Sarah. It's the minister. I know him by his pants. He's the only man that don't go to the city to work that wears creased pants in the morning in this town. Wipe your eyes, Sarah. You don't want him to see you've been cryin'."

"I don't care," wept Sarah. "I'm going to tell him the whole story and ask for his advice. What's a minister for? He can offer up the question to the Lord in prayer."

"If he don't offer it up to his wife, it's all right," Lottie said in a loud whisper, on her way to the door. When she returned, the minister, Silas Whitman, followed her. He had removed his top-coat and appeared clad in clerical black, shabby, but tidy and beautifully kept. Silas Whitman's salary forced careful keeping and nearly prohibited expenditure. He was a very small man, fair, with high, light eyebrows, and light hair growing stiffly from his forehead. As a result, he had a gentle, surprised expression. He took a chair near Sarah Bannister, and she went on at once with her story. Silas listened, and his expression of surprise deepened to one of positive pain.

The minister was not exactly a success in this particular parish. He realized it forlornly, but saw no way out. He was a man whose genuine worth and attainments were dimmed by his personality. He was like a rather splendid piece of trained mechanism doomed to one track, which did not allow him to even use many of his abilities. He was over-educated for the little New England village, he was over-informed; mentally he towered among them like a giant among Lilliputians. There was not among them a man or a woman to whom he could betray his every-day thoughts of the great present of the world. Not one could have understood. During the war he had done his best to discharge his duty to his God and his country among a people whom the war, in spite of their Red Cross work and their contributions to the Expeditionary Forces, never reached. It came the nearest to reaching them when the profiteers hid the sugar and the scarcity began in the stores, when Mrs. A couldn't make currant "jell" and Mrs. B couldn't make peach preserve, and Mrs. C and all the rest of the alphabet could not bring sweet cake to the Ladies' Aid parties, when the men missed the sugar from their coffee; then it seemed to the minister as if through the fruit and pickle season his good New England people peered out and up, almost enough to smell powder and hear the roar of the cannon. At that time the minister preached two war sermons to full congregations, and had hopes. However, after the fruit season, the people settled back in their ruts of the centuries.

Silas, sitting there listening to Sarah's strange story, considered how she was shocked out of her tracks now, but how soon she would regain her step. It seemed a pity. Just now she was dramatic and interesting, and at the crucial moment of the tale, when Sarah had missed the four treasures, the door-bell rang, and Lottie, peering out of the window, announced, "It's her."

"I am so glad you are here," Sarah said to the minister; then, in the next breath, she plucked at his sleeve as the door opened, and begged in a whisper:

"Better let me speak to her first. She's only a child."

The minister nodded, and Lottie reentered, leading Joan, or, rather, pulling her, for the little girl seemed to resist.

"Come here, dear," said Sarah. "Don't be afraid. Nobody is going to hurt you."

The little girl, carrying her bag, which did not seem so full as yesterday, allowed Sarah to put her arm around her.

"Now, dear little girl," said Sarah, and her voice trembled, "I must talk to you, and—"

The child interrupted. "What is the matter?" she inquired, with the sweetest air of pity.

"The matter?" murmured Sarah.

"Yes, ma'am, the matter with you. You have been crying and look worried."

"So I am," said Sarah, stepping into the open emotional door. "I am worrying about you."

The child regarded her with great, blue, troubled eyes. "I am very well, thank you," said Joan. "Please don't cry any more about me. I haven't any stomachache, or toothache, and I said my prayers this morning, and there's nothing ails me, truly."

Sarah gasped. "Do you feel that you have done just right?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Are you a little girl who loves God?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The minister's face twitched. He coughed quickly and drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose. Lottie eyed him sharply. Sarah looked bewildered. The minister looked from her face to the perfectly open, ready-to-answer one of the child, and he coughed again.

"What have you got in your bag to-day?" Sarah inquired, rather hopelessly.

"The other things to sell."

"What other things? Open the bag!"

The girl obeyed at once. She drew forth, one by one, the missing articles of Sarah's collection. She eyed them admiringly. "Pretty," she commented.

Sarah stared.

"Why don't you speak right up to her?" said Lottie.

The little girl stared at her and smiled sweetly. "If you please, ma'am," she said to Sarah Bannister, "I am very busy this morning."

The minister swallowed a chuckle. Lottie looked at him.

"Joan," said Sarah.

"Yes, ma'am," said the child, looking up brightly.

"I have found out that you had sto—taken all those things you sold to me yesterday from me. You sold me my own things."

The little girl gazed. "I am real glad you found out so soon," said she.

"My goodness!" said Lottie.

Sarah gasped. "Why?"

"Because I was afraid you wouldn't."

Sarah stared at her, quite pale.

"I would have told you this morning if you hadn't found out," said the little girl, calmly. She took up the centerpiece which she had brought and looked fondly at it. "This is real handsome and I think you must have worked real hard embroidering it," said she. She added, "This is five dollars."

"You aren't going right on selling me my own things?" gasped Sarah.

"I must sell them to you. I couldn't afford to give them to you, and I mustn't sell them to anybody else."

The minister spoke for the first time. "Why not?" he asked.

She looked wonderingly at him. "It wouldn't be right. Are you the minister?"

Silas replied that he was.

"Then I am surprised you didn't know it wouldn't be right, and had to ask me," remarked Joan.

"Why wouldn't it be just as right to sell to anybody else?" asked Sarah.

Joan looked as though she doubted her hearing correctly.

"Why, they are your own things!" she said, simply.

Lottie came forward with a jerk of decision. "Now you look right at me, little girl," said Lottie. "Do you mean to tell me you don't know it was wrong for you to come here and sell Mrs. Bannister all this stuff?"

"It is hers," said Joan. She looked puzzled.

"Then, if it was hers, why didn't you leave it alone?"

"I wanted to sell it. I wanted the money."

"What for?"

"All those poor little Brett children."

"The Brett children?"

"Yes, ma'am. Their mother died and their father thought he'd like to go and live with another lady, so he got married and the other lady didn't want six children so in a bunch, and so he didn't worry any more

about them, and they were all starving to death and freezing, and there are two just little babies. And so I have them to take care of, and I can't earn money, for I am not old enough, and this is the only way, I decided, and I have just begun, and it works perfectly lovely."

"Goodness!" said Lottie.

Now the Rev. Silas Whitman realized that he must enter the field or be thought a quitter by two of his parishioners.

"Come here, little girl," he said, pleasantly.

Joan went smilingly and stood at his knee.

"Now, my child, listen to me," he said. "Didn't you know it was wrong for you to do such a thing? Don't you know you ought not to take anything whatever that belongs to other people and sell it to them?"

"They are all hers."

"Then why ask her to pay for them?"

"I wanted the money for the poor little Brett children and there wasn't any other way."

"But why should she have to pay for her own things?"

"Because she hadn't given any money to the Brett children, and I didn't begin to ask what they are worth."

"Don't you know it is wrong?"

"No, sir."

"Do you realize what you have done?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me what."

Joan looked up in his face and smiled a smile of innocent intelligence. "I opened one of the long windows in her best room," said she, "and I took those things I sold her yesterday and these I brought to-day, and I hid them in the Brett house. Then yesterday afternoon I packed them very nicely in the bag. I couldn't get all the things in, so I had these left over, and I came and sold them."

"Do you think she is going to pay you any more, you little—" began Lottie, but Sarah hushed her.

"I am not going to pay her, but I am going to give her some more money to buy things for the Brett children," said she.

"And you don't think you have done wrong?" persisted the minister.

Joan looked at him wearily. "They are her own things and she has them back, and she has paid me the money, and you heard her say she was going to give me some more, and it is for the Brett children. I haven't done wrong. The lady didn't give the money in the first place to the Brett children, so, of course, I had to see to it. And now she has her presents all back and everything. I think I must go now or I shall have no time to buy some meat and cook the children's dinner."

Sarah opened her black silk bag and handed a bill to the little girl. "Kiss me, dear," she whispered.

Joan threw both arms around her neck and kissed her, over and over.

"Will you come and see me?" whispered Sarah, fondly.

"Yes, ma'am; I'd love to."

They all stood at a window, watching the child go down the path. Suddenly Silas Whitman began to speak. He seemed unconscious of the two women. He watched the little girl, the red silk rag from her coat-lining streaming, march proudly away with a curious air, as if she led a platoon, not as if she marched alone.

"There she goes," said the minister. "There she goes, red flag flying! Our problem is her truth, and who shall judge? It may be, all of this, the celestial prototype of Bolshevism. She may be the little advance-scout of the last army of the world, the child facing Pharisees, and righteous, and ancient evil, triumphant wisdom. There she goes, little anarchist, holy-hearted in holy cause, and if her way be not as mine, who am I to judge? It may be that breaking the stone letter of the law in the name of love is the fulminate which shatters the last link of evil which holds the souls of the world from God."

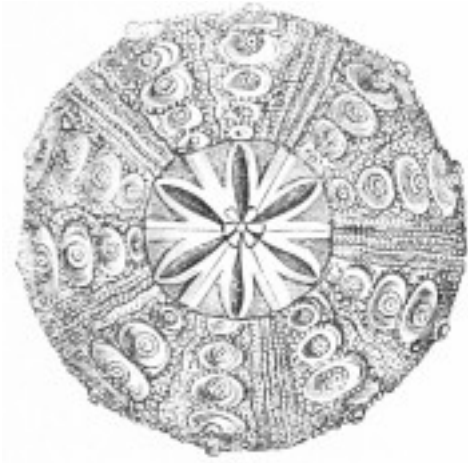
The minister caught up his coat, put it on, and went out. He did not look at the women.

They stared at each other.

"Lordamassey!" said Lottie.

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Rondeau

by Nathanael West
(December 1922)

My lady's eyes appear to be
Like brimming pools of ecstasy,
Deep wells, from which the twinkles flow
Unceasingly as on they go
To charm me with their witchery;
Mayhap an easy prey they see,
Enmeshed by their dexterity;
I can't protest; they thrill me so—
My lady's eyes.

Although they gaze alluringly,
Appealing with such potency,
Oft times in them I see a glow
Which warns me that I should go slow,
For then, you know, I really see
My lady lies!

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Gifts of Oblivion

By Dorothy Canfield

From Harper's Magazine, Sep 1913

HIS was not one of the usual cases of failure of memory, written up picturesquely in the newspapers. After his sojourn in chaos he did not return to life as an unrecognized bit of wreckage, to be sent finally from the hospital without a label. Every one knew all the details of the accident, and knew him to be Matthew Warren. And yet when the doctor, the well-known James Farquhar, M.D., who was the closest friend of the injured man and his wife, pronounced the acute danger past and said that he might be allowed to see his family for a moment, Matthew Warren looked dully at the handsome woman and the two blooming children who, showing a frightened tendency to tears, came to the private room at the hospital to stand by his bedside. "Who are those people?" he asked his nurse, with the weak curiosity of a sick man, losing interest as he spoke. His wife drew back quickly. Dr. Farquhar motioned the visitors away. He did not seem surprised. From that time he was constantly in the sick man's room.

It was not until several days later that the slowly rising tide of Matthew Warren's vitality reached the point where he felt the significance of his condition. He woke from sleep with a scream which brought the watchful doctor to him in a bound. "Who am I? Who am I?" he called, wildly; and then, controlling himself with an effort, clutching at the doctor's arm, his teeth chattering loudly, he added, "I'm very s-s-sorry to trouble you, b-b-but I seem to have h-h-had a nightmare of some s-s-sort, and I can't—I can't remember who I am."

Two months later, when he seemed quite himself again physically, the doctor, having exhausted all other devices, resolved to try taking the sick man home. Perhaps, he argued dubiously, the utter familiarity of his surroundings might speak to his clouded brain. The experiment was tried. Matthew Warren, to all appearances restored to perfect health, went along docilely with his old friend, whom he continued to treat as a new acquaintance. He stepped into the train with no surprise, looked about him quietly, opened a window en route with a practised commuter's knowledge of the catch, and talked, as he had ever since his recovery, calmly and simply of the every-day objects before him. He was especially interested in the first signs of spring in the early April landscape, pointing out to his companion with great pleasure the gray sheen of pussy willows and, as the train approached the

prosperous suburban region, stretches of brilliantly green lawns.

As he walked up the well-raked gravel of the driveway toward his own expensive house he might have been the old Matthew Warren returning, as usual, after his day in the city; and coming to meet him, as usual, was Mrs. Matthew Warren, looking very picturesque in a dress he had always especially admired.

She advanced slowly, shrinking a little, very pale. She had never recovered from the shock of meeting those blankly unresponsive eyes at the hospital. It had wounded and withered something deep in her. Dr. Farquhar looked at her keenly, noting with disapproval the signs of suppressed agitation. He regretted having undertaken the risk of the experiment.

Matthew Warren lifted his hat as she drew near. "I hope you will pardon our trespassing upon your beautiful grounds," he said. She winced at the distant courtesy of the gesture and his accent. He went on, "My friend has, I believe, some errand bringing him here." He put on his hat, stepped a little to one side, to allow his wife and the doctor to walk together, and in an instant was absorbed in the green spears of the daffodils thrusting their vigorous, glistening shafts through the earth.

The woman questioned the doctor with a mute gaze in which was offended pride, as well as grief and bewilderment. She had been the handsomest girl in her set and unreservedly indulged by her husband throughout her married life. Until now she had been always a perfectly satisfied woman, and something in her heart had grown great and exacting, which now revolted angrily against this grotesque trial put upon her by fate.

"Let us try the house," said the specialist.

She walked beside him in silence. Matthew Warren followed them slowly, gazing about him at the newly green lustrous grass and at the trees swinging swollen buds in the warm, damp air. He looked curiously young, not so old, by ten years at least, as the man who, three months before, throwing a reckless wager over his shoulders to those in the tonneau, had clamped down the brake which did not work.

"Jim, I thought best not to have the children here," whispered his wife to the doctor.

He nodded assent. "One can never tell how it will affect him. It has been an especially hard case, because the mere mention of his lost identity throws him into a fever. Otherwise he has been quite reasonable. You must remember that it is absolutely essential to keep perfectly calm yourself. He is a very, very sick man."

Mrs. Warren glanced at her husband and shivered throughout all her big, handsome, healthy body. She seemed to herself to be in a nightmare. It was all incredible. That she, of all people, should be in such a situation!

The owner of the house stepped up on the broad piazza and looked admiringly at the view of the Hudson, the view which he had discovered, and for the sake of which the house had been located where it stood.

"What a splendid stretch of the river your piazza commands!" he said, pleasantly, to his hostess, as the three stood expectantly before the door. She looked at the doctor and opened the door without speaking,

motioning her guests into the big living-room, all in leather shades of brown and tan, with coals shimmering in the fireplace Matthew Warren had designed. Again he broke their silence with a pleasant comment:

"How superb those tulips are! They are more like fire than the fire itself." He glanced casually, indifferently, into his wife's face, then at the doctor, evidently with a moment's wonder that he did not introduce the object of their call, and then away, absently, out of the window. A lilac bush grew near it, and with an exclamation of delight he sprang up to examine it more closely. "Some of those buds are opening!" he announced joyfully to the two who watched him so narrowly. "I see a real little leaf—oh, and another!"

He was answered by an hysteric scream from his wife, and whirled about in astonishment to see the doctor motioning her sternly to silence. She clapped her shaking hand over her mouth, but she could not repress another scream as she met her husband's politely concerned, questioning eyes. And then suddenly she took matters in her own hands. She flung aside the doctor's detaining arm and rushed toward the sick man, crying out:

"Matt! Matt! come to yourself! Look at me! Why, I'm Molly! I'm Molly!" She threw her arms around his neck, sobbing furiously.

Almost instantly she recoiled from his rigid, unresponsive body as violently as she had flung herself upon it. Matthew Warren did not seem aware of her at all. He stood quite still, his eyes turning with a sick slowness upon the doctor.

"Who am I?" he asked, solemnly. His face and neck were of a dull, congested red, and the veins stood out visibly.

Dr. Farquhar, making the best of a bad turn of events, decided to risk all on a bold stroke. He advanced and said, clearly and masterfully, "You are my dear old friend Matthew Warren, and I am Jim Farquhar, and this is your home and your wife."

The other stood motionless. His eyes were fixed on a point in space incalculably distant. After a moment he turned stiffly and walked toward the door.

"There is some mistake," he said, fumbling at the latch. "I cannot for the moment remember who I am, but I have never been in this house before, and this is the first time I ever saw that lady." His trembling hands failed to open the door at once, and the trifling delay seemed the match touched to the tinder of his disordered fancies, for he began to beat on the lock and to scream: "I don't know who I am! Why doesn't somebody tell me who I am! I can't remember who—" Before the doctor could reach him he had gone down in so horridly dislocated and inhuman a heap that his wife ran shrieking from the room and from the house.

His prostration after this second shock was so great that he could not be moved back to the hospital, and he spent the slow month of collapse and utter weakness which followed in his own bed in his own room under the care of two men nurses. His wife had insisted upon men, having a panic fear of a return of his violence. The doctor advised her to keep out of the sick-room, counsel which she seemed not eager to disregard. The children she sent quite away, out of town. In her lonely and frightened days and nights she frequently asked herself with passion what wicked thing she could have done to be so unhappy now! She had a horror of her husband's presence, although she made a gallant effort to

conceal this from the doctor, whom she suspected of watching her jealously for a sign of it; and as the master of the house grew stronger, so that he was reported to her up and dressed, she looked forward to the future with unspeakable dread.

And yet, on the day when, evading his nurses with an insane man's cunning, he crept from the house and disappeared, she led the search for him with unwearied faithfulness, following out every clue suggested to her, setting every possible agency in action, and going unflinchingly with the doctor to look at a corpse recovered from the river. After ten days of this sort of bad dream, Matthew Warren was discovered, not a mile from his own house. He was spading up a bed in the garden of old Timothy O'Donovan, the truck-farmer who supplied the prosperous suburb with green vegetables. As the lost man spaded, he whistled loudly, like a plowboy. The truck-farmer had not dreamed that the battered, muddy, half-witted wayfarer who had asked for work a week before, and who had set himself so vigorously and cheerfully at the tasks given him, could be the wealthy, influential Mr. Warren who owned the fine house at the other end of town.

There was a consultation of brain specialists, Dr. Farquhar, and Mrs. Warren herself. She was questioned minutely as to her husband's mental habits and tendencies, and finally succeeded in unearthing from her memory, never very vivid about other people's preferences, the fact (perhaps significant, the doctors thought) that after she and Matthew were first married, when they were quite poor, Matthew had seemed to enjoy working the bit of land about their first small home.

"But of course," she explained, "as his business grew so rapidly and took more of his time he did less and less of it. We have had a gardener ever since we lived in this house."

It was agreed that in the break-up of his higher faculties he might have returned with a blind instinct to a youthful latent inclination, and that for a while it was best to leave him where he was and trust to the slow healing influence of time and improved physical health, since all other curative means had failed. If Mrs. Warren felt an involuntary relief at this decision, she hid it deep in her heart, and throughout the discussion she showed herself loyally willing to do whatever seemed best for the man who had been her husband. And so began the anomalous situation which was to last so long that even village tongues stopped gossiping of it.

Mrs. Warren's first distracted impulse had been to take the children and go away—abroad, perhaps. That had seemed to her the only endurable future. But she gave up this plan when the doctor showed a disappointed and sternly disapproving surprise that she "abandon" a man who might be in desperate need at almost any time.

"I see, Jim—yes, of course, I see," she had submissively assented. She cared intensely that those who knew of this crisis in her life should approve her action.

As a matter of fact, her acquiescence to his opinion cost her far less than she feared. The miraculous capacity of life to renew itself under any and all circumstances came brilliantly to the rescue of a nature normal above everything else. It was not long before she and the children had reorganized an existence which was tolerable at first, and then, as time slid smoothly by without change, not without its great compensations. There was plenty of money, since Matthew's business had been disposed of at a good profit, and there was very little care. The children, ten and twelve respectively, enjoyed perfect health, grew fast, were not troublesome to their vigorous mother, and had absorbing youthful interests of their own. They adapted themselves with great tact and good sense to their peculiar situation. Like their mother, they were large and comely, with a healthfully ready ability to be satisfied with life. It was hard

to connect the well-groomed, trimly attired, prepossessing trio, riding and driving about the "residential portion" of the suburb, with the shabby, half-daft hired man in overalls who rarely left the truck-farm at the other end of town. In a surprisingly short time even those who knew of the unprecedented circumstances came almost involuntarily to regard Mrs. Warren as a highly ornamental widow, and the children as half-orphans.

Not that they themselves had the bad taste to make a mystery of the affair. The sad story was told with a frank sadness to their intimates, and roused among the young friends of the children a sort of romantic admiration for their extraordinary situation. From the first they had all three followed to the letter the doctor's recommendation to keep away from the region of the truck-farm. They depended for news of the sick man upon the doctor himself, who took care to go past the O'Donovan place at not infrequent intervals to inquire particulars of the new "help."

There, too, as frequently happens with busy people absorbed in their own difficult affairs, O'Donovan and his wife adjusted themselves to the singular state of things with a rapidity which astonished them. The half-fearful curiosity they had felt toward the new laborer when they first learned his identity gave way little by little to an unsurprised acquiescence in his kindly, simple presence and his peculiarities. For the second shock, which had come to him during his wife's wild appeal, had, it seemed, been even more violent than the first. He had seemed only to forget his identity before. Now he had lost it. He could not now have opened automatically the window in the commuter's train. That second month of oblivion had left him with practically no memory of any kind. He not only did not know who he was, but he could not remember from one day to the next. From morning till night he was like other men; but at every dawn he rose up singing, with a mind as blank of past experiences as a little child's.

This was, of course, until a way had been invented to obviate it, the cause of the greatest practical inconvenience, since he could not remember instructions given him the day before, nor even to continue a task half completed. The trucker and his wife had several highly irritating experiences with him, as on the occasion when, having been set to plow a patch in the garden, he went on plowing because nobody told him to stop and he had forgotten orders given him the day before, until he had turned under all the sod of the O'Donovans' only meadow. Finally, applying their Celtic wits to the problem, they took advantage of the capacity of their new servant for fluent reading and writing. They gave him a standing order to carry about with him a pad of paper and a pencil, to set down in black and white every instruction given him, and to consult it at every step. He obeyed this command with a smiling, absent docility, giving, as always at this period of his life, the strange impression of one wrought upon by sweet and secret thoughts. The O'Donovans said that to see him walk across the barnyard you would know he was fey.

After this device was in working order, O'Donovan boasted that no man could wish for better help than this stalwart, cheerful, deft-handed laborer, who loved every plant in the long rows of the truck-farm, worked, whistling and singing, all day long, and never asked for a holiday. For a long time his only excursions away from the farm were on Sundays, when he went with his employer and Mrs. O'Donovan to the little Roman Catholic church set in the midst of the poorer quarter of the suburb. He could not follow the mass, but it gave him obvious pleasure to listen to the music and to look at the priest's robes and the red and white of the acolytes' garb.

Two years after his arrival at the farm he could scarcely have been recognized by his wife and children if they had seen him. Like his employer, he had allowed his beard to grow, a thick mass of brown, without a gray hair in it, although Dr. Farquhar knew him to be nearly fifty. Above this, his tanned, ruddy face and quiet eyes gave no hint of the keen animation and the piercingly satirical look which

had been Matthew Warren's.

Timothy O'Donovan and his wife, childless, solitary old people, came to love the kindly "innocent," whom they regarded as a child, almost as though he had been of their own blood. Old Mrs. O'Donovan especially petted him and cherished him, and lavished on him the affection which she had been so ready to give the son Heaven had never granted her. As she and her husband grew older, and as this adopted member of their family began to seem more "like other people," read books, studied farming and trucking seriously, and recovered something of his shattered memory for every-day events, he was trusted with more and more of the farming and the business. The slow clearing of his mind brought out traces of his superior education, and this, together with a considerable native aptitude for the business, was a great asset to the primitive older farmer. They started tentatively some hot-beds for early vegetables which later grew by degrees to a greenhouse. The younger man, after several years of experimenting, developed a new variety of tomato, especially suited to their conditions. He called it, after Mrs. O'Donovan, the "Aileen," a tribute which pleased her greatly. Not having a name of his own, the assistant took that of his employer, and the newer people of the town thought them father and son. Sometimes he drove the delivery wagon into town to the market, early in the morning, and later, so little vivid did his past seem to the O'Donovans, was sent once in a while to the Warren house to deliver at the tradesman's door their daily supply of fresh salads.

When Mrs. O'Donovan died he mourned her with sorrow so sincere that her bereaved old husband felt him to be the one link which still bound him to life, and seven years later, when old Timothy himself passed away in the arms of his faithful servitor, it was found that he had left the farm and house to the wanderer who, twelve years before, haggard and nameless, had stumbled desperately up his garden path.

The new farmer was not long to lead a solitary life. A great-nephew of O'Donovan's, a boy of fourteen, left orphaned in Ireland before his uncle's death, had already started out to the States, and four or five days after the funeral he arrived at the house, horribly frightened at everything so strange and different, horribly homesick, horribly alone, and more than willing to accept the instantly offered home thrown open to him by his uncle's successor, whom he thought his own blood relative. When he had recovered from his first panic he proved himself very useful to the solitary man. He was of the shrinking, shy, fawn-eyed type of Irish boy, very handy about the house, "as good as a girl," his dead mother had often said of him, and he took over the domestic end of the new partnership. He proved to have a taste for music, and his guardian arranged for a weekly lesson from a violinist in town. He himself sat in the evenings on the porch, smoking, reading, and listening with a pleased smile to the singing of the fiddle in the room behind him. They were both always in bed by nine o'clock.

Sometimes, for an outing, he took the lad with him on his trips to town, pointing out, among other objects of interest, the fine houses of the wealthy residents and, on the rare occasions when they were detained so long as to witness the awakening of the suburb, the miraculously well-tailored people who inhabited them. His daughter, after a very successful young-ladyhood competently managed by her mother, was married now to a prosperous, hard-working, commuting banker, considerably older than herself, and lived in a house a little more expensive and very much more in accord with the latest fashions in domestic architecture than her mother's, which was now, in the swiftly advancing American town, one of the "older residences." His son still lived at home, a famous tennis-player and athlete, who occasionally, flanneled to perfection, walked past on his way to the tennis-courts, or, his smooth yellow hair tossed back from his healthy, unexcited face, galloped on his well-groomed hunter past his father's vegetable cart. Mrs. Warren too was to be seen not infrequently, as handsome, though not as slender, as formerly, the image of good comfort and good fortune, hurrying from one engagement to another,

consulting her watch and tapping a well-dressed foot in impatience at the slowness of her car, as in years gone by. She had never thought, apparently, of seeking a divorce from her husband. Among her numerous friends this constancy was much admired.

These swept by the burly, elderly gardener without a look, quite sincerely unaware of his identity. They relied on the doctor to let them know if the now quite unlooked-for "change" should ever take place, and they all of them led absorbing lives of the greatest interest to themselves.

Dr. Farquhar, whom the gardener had come to know again in his new existence through his visits to the two O'Donovans, always nodded as he passed, and received in return a respectful tradesman's salute.

Of all those concerned he alone continued to be desperately unreconciled to the state of things. His physician's pride had been stung by his professional defeat, which had, moreover, involved the ruin of his dearest friend. In spite of the friendly cordiality of Mrs. Warren, he could never rid himself of an unworthy and unfair tendency to blame her for her own untroubled good fortune. He was frequently called to the Warren house professionally and could not enter that dignified home of ease without thinking bitterly of the man exiled from it and from all his natural birthright, to poverty and obscurity, and grinding daily manual labor. He compared Mrs. Warren's smooth, aristocratic, significant hands with the work-worn claws of the ignorant old Irishwoman who had furnished so long poor Warren's only contact with the refinements of the world of women. He thought of Warren's own hands, which he had known so sensitive and nervously active, now thickened and calloused, lying half open on his knees, in the dull passivity of the laboring-man. Once or twice the doctor had been compelled to take a meal en famille with the Warrens, and the delicately served food had choked him. He remembered that Warren usually nowadays sat down to a single coarse dish of stew, prepared by the little Irish lout whom he had adopted. He looked about him at the tasteful elegance of the spacious interior and thought of the bare four-roomed cabin which now sheltered the master of this house. The faithful friend, feeling Warren's grotesque and tragic fate as though it were his own, had never been able to stay all through one of Mrs. Warren's evening entertainments. The well-to-do atmosphere of expansive ease and affluence in those handsome rooms formed too embittering a contrast in his loyal mind with the imprisoning round of toil of his friend and the rustic companionship which was the only break in the solitude of his life.

Once, as the doctor fled desperately away from a cotillion, and came out shivering into the cold dawn, shrugging on his overcoat and frowning, he caught sight of the O'Donovan vegetable cart making its early start for the market. He stood still in front of the Warren house, the chilly morning air whipping streaks of red up into his pale reveler's face. The horses jogged by, Warren holding the reins loosely, his powerful body lounging on the seat, his coarse shirt open at the throat. Dr. Farquhar gazed at his weather-beaten face and raged inwardly. As the cart passed the entrance to the driveway the driver glanced up at the Warren house, saw the lighted windows yellow in the clear, blue dawn, and then caught sight of the doctor hugging his Inverness about him. He nodded cheerfully.

"It's a fine morning, Doctor," he called, and passed on.

The doctor heard him begin a moment later to whistle loudly, the sweet, shrill treble piercing the air like a bird's note.

Dr. Farquhar clenched his fists angrily. He thought of the brilliant future which had lain open before his friend, he remembered his absorbing, crowded life of varied intellectual interests, his first promising success in politics, the beginning of his reputation as an after-dinner speaker, his growing influence in

financial circles, his notable social gifts, and then his beautiful, faithful wife, his creditable, highly successful children—and then—ah, what a professional triumph to effect such a cure after so long! The doctor said aloud:

"I will go to see that man in Vienna. There's no harm in watching him operate."

Four months later he was back again, and went straight from the station, where he landed at dusk, to the O'Donovan farmhouse. It was early autumn and, although not yet eight o'clock, the first stars were already emerging from a pure, quiet sky. He heard the singing of the violin as he went up the walk, and in answer to his knock young Tim came to the door, the echo of the music on his still dreaming face.

"He's in the garden, sir, the master is, but if you'll kindly take a seat I'll step an' call him. He likes to take one look around before we go to bed. They say around here that he can't sleep unless he's tucked the plants up and given them a pat like."

Dr. Farquhar sat down and crossed his legs. The hanging foot jerked nervously. It was extremely quiet there on the side road. He could hear the distant murmur of the boy's voice and the man's answer. He could count every step of their return as though they were the beats of his own heart—across the soft ground of the field, the dusty road, the hard- beaten path. The big, roughly dressed man stood there before him, looking up at him with a quiet smile.

"Were you wanting to see me, Doctor?" said the gardener.

The doctor rose, breathing quickly, facing the other's kindly, patient eyes with some nervous irritation.

"Yes, yes—I have a great deal to say to you, Mr.—" He hesitated, balked over the name, used his hesitation as a desperately seized opening, and said, impatiently, "Of course you know that your name is not really O'Donovan."

The gardener turned to the slim figure loitering at the gate and called, "Tim, 'tis time you were in bed." The lad moved obediently up the path, humming under his breath the slow melody he had been playing on his violin.

"All right, Uncle," he said, good-humoredly, and disappeared.

The gardener sat down on the edge of the tiny porch. "I take it it is something very particular you have to say, Doctor?" he asked, not without a touch of apprehension in his voice.

The doctor nodded and began to speak rapidly, violently. He had not gone far before the gardener stood up in evident agitation. He shook his head, frowning, and motioned the other to silence.

"I'm all right as I am," he said, curtly. "What is the good of prying into what's long past and nobody knows about, anyhow. Such things oughtn't to be stirred up—they only—" The doctor beginning to talk again, he raised 'his voice to cry angrily: "I don't want to hear any more such talk! 'Tis better to take things as they are. Nobody is the better for prying into secrets that—"

Dr. Farquhar flew at him in a passion of intensity which beat down his opposition. "Will you listen to me!" he commanded in a voice of fury. "Just listen to what I have to say! Almost your life and death are

at stake. You shall listen!"

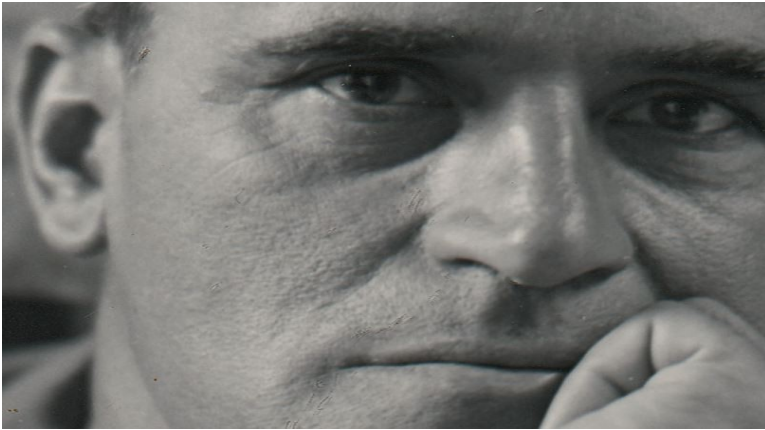
The gardener gave a gesture of impatience, but he sat down and did not again interrupt the doctor's vehement monologue. Occasionally he rubbed his big palms on his knees stiffly. The crickets sang loudly. From up-stairs Tim's window threw a square of yellow light on the flower-beds in the front yard. His clear alto dropped down to them in snatches of his slowly moving adagio. The stars came out, one by one, and then in clusters, until an innumerable radiant company shone down on the two figures on the porch. The doctor's harangue drew to a close.

"I have followed your case from the beginning; and although one can never be absolutely sure of the results of so grave an operation, I am so certain that I cannot but insist that you place yourself in my hands. When you have come to yourself and realize your lost identity, you will fully understand and share the intensity of my feeling on this point—" He stopped to draw breath, leaning forward toward the man he was addressing, his brows drawn together as he tried to read the other man's expression. The faint light of the stars allowed him to see that the other's face showed emotion. It seemed a good moment for a pause.

The light went out in the room above them. The crickets had stopped chirping. It was in an intense silence that the man in the rough clothes turned his head and looked strangely at the doctor. He drew a long breath and said, gravely, "Why, Jim, my memory came back more than eight years ago."

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AS THE COMING OF DAWN

By James Branch Cabell

From The Smart Set, Sep 1902

OH, I say, you know!" observed Billy Woods, as he finished the sixth chapter of "Ashtaroth's Lacquey," and flung down the book.

"Rot, utter rot," assented Mr. Charteris, pleasantly; "puerile and futile trifling with the fragments of the seventh commandment, as your sturdy common sense instantly detected. In fact," he added, hopefully, "I think it's quite bad enough to go into a tenth edition."

Coming from the author, this should have been fairly conclusive; but Billy refused to be comforted. "Look here, Jack!" said he, pathetically, "why don't you brace up and write something—decent?"

Charteris flicked the ashes from his cigarette, with conscious grace. "Is not impropriety the spice of literature?" he queried, softly. "Sybarite that I am, I have descended to this that I might furnish butter for my daily bread!" He refilled his glass and held the sparkling drink for a moment against the light. "This time next year," said he, dreamily, "I shall be able to afford cake; for I shall have written 'As the Coming of Dawn.' "

Mr. Woods sniffed, and refilled his glass likewise.

"For the reign of subtle immorality," sighed Mr. Charteris, "is well-nigh over. Already the augurs of the pen wink as they fable of a race of men evilly scintillant in talk and gracefully erotic. We know that this, alas, cannot be, and that in real life our peccadilloes shrink into dreary vistas of divorce-cases and the police-court, and that crime has lost its splendor. We sin very carelessly—sordidly, at times—and artistic wickedness is rare. It is a pity; life was once a scarlet volume scattered with misty-coated demons; it is now a yellow journal, wherein our virtues are the not infrequent misprints, and our vices the hackneyed formulas of journalists. Yes, it is a pity!"

"Dear Jack," remonstrated Mr. Woods, "you are sadly passé; that pose is of the Beardsley period and went out many magazines ago."

"The point is well taken," admitted Mr. Charteris, "for our life of to-day is already reflected—faintly, I

grant you—in the best-selling books. We have passed through the period of a slavish admiration for wickedness and wide margins; our quondam decadents now snigger in a parody of primeval innocence, and many things are forgiven the latter-day poet if his botany be irreproachable. Indeed, it is quite time; for we have tossed over the contents of every closet in the ménage à trois. And I—moi, qui vous parle—I am wearied of hansom-cabs and the flaring lights of Broadway, and henceforth I shall demonstrate the beauty of pastoral innocence."

"Saul among the prophets," suggested Mr. Woods, helpfully.

"Quite so," assented Mr. Charteris; "and my first prophecy will be 'As the Coming of Dawn.' "

Mr. Woods tapped his forehead significantly. "Mad, quite mad!" said he, in parenthesis.

"I shall be idyllic," continued Mr. Charteris, sweetly. "I shall write of the ineffable glory of first love; I shall babble of green fields and the keen odors of Spring and the shame-faced countenances of lovers met after last night's kissing. It will be the story of love that stirs blindly in the hearts of maids and youths, and does not know that it is love—the love that manhood has half forgotten and that youth has not skill to write of. But I shall write its story as it has never been written before; and I shall make a great book of it, that will go into thousands and thousands of editions. Before heaven, I will!" He brought his fist down emphatically on the table.

"H'm!" said Mr. Woods, dubiously; "going back to renew associations with your first love? You'll find her grandchildren terribly in the way, you know."

"It is imperative," said Mr. Charteris, shortly, "for the scope of my book that I should view life through youthful eyes."

Mr. Woods whistled softly. "'Honorable young gentleman,' " he murmured, as to himself, "'desires to meet attractive young lady. Object: to learn how to be idyllic in four-hundred pages.' "

There was no answer.

"I say, Jack," queried Mr. Woods, "do you think this—this sort of thing is fair to the girl? Isn't it a little cold-blooded?"

Charteris smiled, somewhat evasively. "To-morrow," said he, with firmness, "I leave Greenfield Springs in search of 'As the Coming of Dawn.' "

"Look here," said Mr. Woods; "if you start on a tour of the country, looking for assorted dawns and idylls, it'll end in my bailing you out of the lock-up. You take a liver-pill and go to bed."

II

Charteris notified the hotel-clerk and the newspaper correspondents next morning that Greenfield was about to be bereft of the presence of the distinguished novelist. Then, as his train did not leave till night, he resolved to be bored on horseback, rather than on the golf-links, and had Chloris summoned from the stables for a final investigation of the country roads thereabouts.

Chloris elected to follow a new route this afternoon shortly after leaving the hotel grounds, and

Charteris, knowing by long experience that any questioning of this decision could but result in undignified defeat, assented. Thus it came about that they trotted down a green country lane and came to a narrow brook, which babbled across the roadway and was overhung with thick foliage that lisped and whispered cheerfully in the placid light of the declining sun. It was there that the germ of "As the Coming of Dawn" was found.

For Charteris had fallen into a revery, and Chloris, taking advantage of this, twitched the reins from his hand and proceeded to satisfy her thirst in a manner that was rather too noisy to be quite good form. Charteris sat in patience, idly observing the sparkling reflection of the sunlight on the water. Then Chloris snorted, as something rustled through the underbrush, and Charteris, turning, perceived a vision.

The vision was in white, with a maddening profusion of open-work. There were blue ribbons connected with it. There were also black eyes, of the almond-shaped, heavy-lidded sort that Charteris had thought existed only in Lely's pictures, and great coils of brown hair that was gold where the chequered sunlight fell upon it, and two lips that were very red. He was filled with a deep pity for his tired horse and a resolve that for this once her thirst should be quenched. Thereupon, he lifted his cap hastily, but Chloris scrambled to the other bank, spluttered, and had carried him a quarter of a mile before Charteris announced to the evening air that he was a fool and that Chloris was various picturesque but uncomplimentary things. Then he smiled, equivocally.

"Dainty little Philistine!" said he.

After this they retraced their steps, Charteris peering anxiously about the road.

"Pardon me," said Charteris, subsequently; "have you seen anything of a watch—a small gold one, set with pearls?"

"Heavens!" said the vision, sympathetically, "what a pity! Are you sure it fell here?"

"I don't seem to have it about me," answered Charteris, with cryptic significance. He searched about his pockets, with a puckered brow. "And as we stopped here—" He looked inquiringly into the water.

"From this side," observed the vision, impersonally, "there is less glare from the brook."

Having tied Chloris to a swinging limb, Charteris sat down contentedly. The vision moved hurriedly, lest he should be crowded.

"It might be further up the road," she suggested, demurely.

"I must have left it at the hotel," observed Charteris, rapt in meditation.

"You might look," said she, peering into the water.

"Forever!" assented he, rather fatuously.

The vision flushed. "I didn't mean—" she began.

"I did," quoth Charteris, "every word of it."

"In that case," said she, rising, "I shall—" A frown wrinkled her brow; then a deep, curved dimple performed a similar office for her cheek, as Charteris sighed pathetically. "I wonder—" said she, with some hesitation.

"Of course not," said he, composedly; "there's nobody about."

The vision sat down. "You mentioned your sanatorium?" quoth she, sweetly.

"The Asylum of Love," said Charteris; "discharged—under a false impression—as cured; and sent to paradise."

"Oh!" said she.

"It is," said he, defiant.

She looked about her. "The woods are beautiful," she conceded, softly.

"They form an admirable background," said he, with some irrelevance. "It is a veritable Eden, before the coming of the snake."

"Before?" queried she, dubiously.

"Undoubtedly," said Charteris. He felt his ribs, in meditative wise. "And just after——"

"It is quite time," said she, judicially, "for me to go home."

"It is not good," pleaded Charteris, "for man to be alone."

"I have heard," said she, "that the—almost any one can cite Scripture to his purpose."

Charteris thrust out a foot for inspection. "No suggestion of a hoof," said he; "no odor of brimstone, and my inoffensive name is John Charteris."

"Of course," she submitted, virtuously, "I could never think of making your acquaintance in this irregular fashion; and, therefore, of course, I could not think of telling you that my name is Marian Winwood."

"Of course not," agreed Charteris; "it would be highly improper."

There was an interval. Charteris smiled.

"I am country-bred," said she, in flushed explanation; "and you are——"

"A citizen of no mean city," he admitted. "I am from New York!"

"—horrid," finished she.

Charteris groaned, miserably.

"But I have been to New York," said she.

"Ah?" said he, vacantly. "Eden Musée?"

"Yes," said she, with ill-concealed pride.

Charteris groaned once again.

"And it is quite time for me to go to supper," she concluded, with some lack of sequence.

"Look here!" remonstrated he; "it isn't six yet." He exhibited his watch to support this statement.

"Oh!" she cried, with wide, indignant eyes.

"I—I mean—" stammered he.

She rose to her feet.

"—I'll explain——"

"I do not care to listen to any explanations."

"—to-morrow."

"You will not." This was said very firmly. "And I hope you will have the kindness to keep away from these woods; for I always walk here in the afternoon." Then, with an indignant toss of the head, the vision disappeared.

Charteris whistled. Subsequently, he galloped back to the hotel.

"See here!" said he, to the hotel-clerk; "how long does this place keep open?"

"Season closes October fifteenth, sir."

"All right; I'll need my room till then. Here, boy! See if my luggage has been taken to the station; and, if it has, send it back—Charteris, Room 249—and be quick!"

III

"It will be very dreadful," sighed she, in a tired voice; "for I shall come here every afternoon. And there will be only ghosts in the woods—wistful, pathetic ghosts of dead days—and I shall be very lonely."

"Dear," said Charteris, "is it not something to have been happy? It has been such a wonderful Summer, and come what may, nothing—nothing—can rob us of its least golden moment. And it is only for a little."

"You will come back?" said she, half-doubtingly.

"Yes," said Charteris, and felt the black waves of degradation and unutterable self-contempt sweep over his soul, like a flood, and wash the manhood from it. "You wonderful, elfin creature, I shall come back—to your home, that I have seen only from a distance. I don't believe you live there—you live in some great, gnarled oak hereabouts, and at night its bark uncloses to set you free, and you and your sisters dance out the satyrs' hearts in the moonlight. I know you are a dryad—a wonderful, laughing, clear-eyed dryad strayed out of the golden age."

"Alas!" said she, sadly; "I am only a girl, dear—a very weak, frightened girl, with very little disposition to laughter just now. For you are going away. Oh, Jack, you have meant so much to me! The world is so different since you have come, and I am so happy and so miserable that—that I am afraid." An impossible, infinitesimal handkerchief stole upward to two great, sparkling eyes.

"Dear!" said Charteris. And this remark appeared to meet the requirements of the situation.

Then there was a silence which he devoted to a consideration of the pitiful littleness of his soul. The Autumn woods flushed and burned about them; there was already the damp odor of decaying leaves in the air. The whinnying of Chloris smote the stillness like an impertinence. The Summer was ended; but "As the Coming of Dawn" was practically complete.

It was not the book that Charteris had planned, but a far greater one that was scarcely his. There was no word written, as yet. But for two months he had viewed life through Marian Winwood's eyes; day by day, his half-formed, tentative ideas had been laid before her with elaborate carelessness, to be approved, altered or rejected, as she decreed, until at last they were welded into a perfect, compact whole that was a book. Bit by bit, they had planned it, he and she; and, as Charteris dreamed of it as it should be, his brain was fired with exultation, and he defied his soul and swore that the book, for which he had pawned his self-respect, was worth—well worth—the price that he had paid. This was in Marian's absence.

"Dear!" said she.

Charteris looked up into her eyes. They were filled with a tender, unutterable confidence that thrilled him like physical cold. "Marian," said he, simply, "I shall never come back."

Her eyes widened a trifle, but she did not seem to comprehend.

"Have you never wondered," said he, hoarsely, "that I have never kissed you?"

"Yes," she answered. Her voice was emotionless.

"And yet—yet—" Charteris sprang to his feet. "Dear God, how I have longed! Yesterday, only yesterday, as I read to you from the verses I had made to other women, those women that are but pale, colorless shadows by the side of your stanch, vivid beauty—and you listened wonderingly and said the proper things and then lapsed into dainty boredom—how I longed to take you in my arms, and quicken your calm Philistine blood with my kisses! You knew—you must have known! Did you sleep last night?" he queried, a sharp note in his voice.

"No," said she, dully.

"Nor I. All night I tossed in sick, fevered dreams of you. I am mad for love of you. And yet only once

have I kissed—your hand. Dear God, your hand!" His voice quavered, effectively.

"Yes," said she; "I remember."

"I have struggled; I have conquered this madness—for madness it is. We can laugh together and be excellent friends—no more. We have laughed, have we not, dear, a whole Summer through? Now comes the ending. Ah, I have seen you puzzling over my meaning ere this—now follows a laugh."

She smiled, stupidly.

"For we can laugh together—that is all. We are not mates. You were born to be the wife of a strong man and the mother of his clean-blooded children, and you and your sort will inherit the earth and make the laws for us poor weaklings who dream and scribble and paint. We are not mates. But you have been very kind to me. I thank you and say good-bye; and I pray that I may never see you after to-day."

There was something of magnificence in the egotism of the man and his complacent deprecation of his artistic temperament; it was a barrier he recognized unquestioningly; and with equal plainness he perceived the petty motives that now caused him to point it out to Marian. His lips curled half in mockery of himself as he framed the bitter smile he felt the situation demanded; but he was fired with the part he was playing, and half-belief crept into his mind that Marian was created chiefly for the purpose she had already served. He regarded her shrunken form as through the eyes of future readers of his biography. She represented an episode in his life. He pitied her sincerely, and under all, his lower nature, held in leash for two months past, chuckled and grinned and leaped at the thought of a holiday.

She rose to her feet. "Good-bye," said she.

"You—you understand, dear?" he queried, tenderly.

"Yes," she answered; "I understand—not what you have just told me, for in that, of course, you have lied. But I understand you, Jack, dear. Ah, believe me, you are not an uncommon type, a type not strong enough to live life healthily—just strong enough to dabble in life, to trifle with emotions, to experiment with other people's lives. Indeed, I am not angry, Jack, dear; I am only—sorry; and the Summer has been very happy."

IV

Charteris returned to New York and wrote "As the Coming of Dawn." He spent nine months in this. His work at first was mere copying of the completed book that had already existed in his brain; but when it was transcribed therefrom, he wrote and rewrote, cast and recast each paragraph of the fantastic, jeweled English that had made him the despair of his admirers. It was the work of his life; it was beautiful and strong and clean; and he dandled the child of his brain tenderly for a while and arrayed it in perfect garments and clothed it in words that had a taste in the mouth and would one day lend an aroma to the printed page, and rejoiced shamelessly in that which he had done. Then he went out and sought the luxury of a Turkish bath, and in the morning, after a rub-down and an ammonia cocktail, awoke to the fact that there were breakfasts in the world that sent forth savory odors and awaited the coming of ravenous humanity.

A week later, he sent for Billy Woods and informed him that he, Charteris, was a genius: waved certain type-written pages to demonstrate the fact. He added, as an afterthought, that he was a cad.

Subsequently, he read divers portions of "As the Coming of Dawn" aloud, and Mr. Woods sipped Chianti of a rare flavor and listened.

"Look here!" said Mr. Woods, suddenly; "have you seen 'The Imperial Votaress'?"

Mr. Charteris frowned petulantly. "Don't know the lady," said he.

"She's advertised on half the posters in town," said Mr. Woods. "And it's the book of the year. And it's your book."

Mr. Charteris laid down his manuscript. "I beg your pardon?" said he.

"Your book," repeated Mr. Woods, firmly; "scarcely a hair's difference between them, except in the names."

"H'm!" observed Mr. Charteris, in a careful voice. "Who wrote it?"

"Marian Winwood," said Mr. Woods.

"Eh?" said Mr. Charteris. "Name sounds familiar, somehow."

"Dear me!" remonstrated Billy. "Why, she wrote 'A Bright Particular Star,' you know, and 'The Acolytes,' and—and lots of others." Billy is not literary in his tastes.

The author of "As the Coming of Dawn" swallowed a glass of Chianti at a gulp.

"Of course," said he, slowly, "I can't, in my position, run the risk of being charged with plagiarism."

Thereupon, he threw the manuscript into the open fire, which his thin blood and love of the picturesque rendered necessary, even in May.

"Oh, look here!" cried Billy, catching up the papers. "It—it's infernally good, you know! Can't you—can't you fix it—change it a bit?"

Mr. Charteris took the manuscript and replaced it firmly among the embers. "As you justly observe," said he, "it is infernally good. It is much better than anything else I shall ever write."

"Why, then—" said Billy.

"Why, then," said Mr. Charteris, "the only thing that remains to do is to read 'The Imperial Votaress.' "

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Marigolds (1919)

by Mary Ellen Chase

Spring had come to the Perkins' meadow. A flicker screamed the news from the top of a solitary hackmatack by the south stone wall, and a robin announced a joint arrival as he went house-hunting in the wild crab by the pasture bars. From the freshly turned furrows of Nathan Perkins' plow the mist moved skyward after its long imprisonment. Through the long grass by the brook, which for years had made the Perkins' farm the best in the village* the water-rats scurried on secret, silent errands, and a single dandelion glowed like a fallen planet upon a tiny green hummock close to the amber water.

Every living, growing thing in the meadow throbbed with new life — except Nathan. He held the plow, the horse's reins around his neck, and trudged stodgily through the brown earth and over the broken sods. He was relieved that the soil was drier than he had expected. April plowing would be possible — the first time in years. With an early harvest in these war-times, it looked as though the farmer might at last get his innings, Nathan told himself a little churlishly. He turned the horse around, began a new furrow, and plodded on*

With Mary Ann, his wife, things were different. Things always had been different with her in spite of the Perkins' farm, an endless procession of drab days, and thirty years of Nathan. Through the blessing or the curse of Providence, or nature, or that illusive possession called temperament, Mary Ann had never lost receptiveness. She still thrilled. She thrilled at the laughter of children, a wild rose by the pasture fence, a Christmas carol, a crescent moon, the fur-capped buds of hepaticas beneath the pines, the presence of death, the scarlet of woodbine. She was like the jewel-weed by the spring, or the leaves of the poplar in the front yard.

That morning as she and Nathan had sat at breakfast she caught sight of a purple crocus in the sparse grass beyond the path to the kitchen door. She had watched for days for that crocus. Last year it had shown its first faint tinge of color in the afternoon when she had been free to watch its unfolding. This year it had opened in the night to surprise her. Her eyes filled with tears and her hand trembled a little as she passed Nathan his coffee. He paused and regarded her uneasily.

"Not sick, are ye?" 1 he asked, anx- iously. " Bad time to get a cold or any- thing just now, with two men comin' next week to plant."

"I'm not sick,*" she assured him.

Nathan resumed his breakfast. Mary Ann ate little and absently. She wanted to watch the sun on the purple crocus, but she waited. Nathan finished his third doughnut, took his old black hat from the row of kitchen pegs, and went to the barn. Five minutes later Mary Ann saw him driving Jerry toward the meadow. She cleared the table hurried- ly, putting the food in the cellarway and the dishes in the sink ready for washing. Then without stopping for the black shoulder shawl, which on less rare occasions she always wore over her blue house-dress, she went out of doors.

The crocus claimed her first attention. It had grown, she thought, since she had handed Nathan his coffee. Its pur- ple, cup-shaped face was opening in the sun, and its pale stem seemed longer. A glint of yellow like the gold of a new coin shone in the grass but a few inches from the purple crocus. It was a yellow brother, coming up to meet the sunlight.

Mary Ann touched the petals of each softly. Then she touched the brown clambering stalks of woodbine which grew over the back porch. She knew what secrets the woodbine harbored. She opened the white gate leading to the garden inclosure at the front of the house. Lilacs grew just beyond the gate. Except for the swelling of buds there was no sign of green as yet, but Mary Ann saw thousands of heart-shaped leaves completing the groundwork, design for pyramids of white and purple. She saw lilacs tossing in the wind, felt them fresh and wet against her cheek in the early morning, smelled their warm fragrance at noon and their faint perfume through the open window at night, saw them borne in armfuls by the children on Memorial Day.

The sy ring as by the parlor windows gave no hope, but Mary Ann saw the ivory and gold of their blossoms, and trusted. The peonies in the two round beds on either side of the gravel walk were also reticent* Mary Ann bent over their brown stalks, fascinated by the knowledge of what they would bring forth. Peonies had a strange effect upon Mary Ann, They fascinated, yet em- barrased her. She could not get away from the idea that they were laughing at her plainness. They made her fee! as Mrs. Hoyt-Sherman from the summer colony across the bay had made her feel when sin; had come in silk and diamonds one afternoon to the church sewing- circle.

Sometimes Mary Ann felt even more strongly about the peonies. On warm June days, when they flaunted their scarlet, shining petals and emitted a subtle, sweet fragrance, she almost knew they were brazen women, sunk in wick- edness. She likened them to Jezebel, or to Bern ice, that wicked wife of King Agrippa, who "with great pomp," ac- cording to the Scriptures, questioned St. Paul at Caesarea. Often she was half- tempted to pull up their roots and plant white ones of the more chaste variety offered by her neighbor, but she never quite accomplished it. The red wine of life flowed through those scarlet petals, and typified to Mary Ann a daring which, fear it as she would, she secretly, perhaps half-unconsciously, longed to possess.

In her garden survey she paused long- est at two beds next the white picket fence and on either side of the gravel walk. They were empty except for a few withered leaves and some dead re- minders of the last year's occupants. Mary Ann took a handful of soil Warmed by two days' continuous sun, it was drying quickly. Planting, as Nathan had said, was not far off.

Through the fence palings she looked at Nathan — a stooped, stolid figure plowing in the meadow opposite. His back was toward her. Then she surveyed the withered remnants of plants, A few quick jerks and they had left the earth; a toss and they lay in the ditch between the short lawn and the road.

"Tomatoes!" said Mary Ann, contemptuously. "Tomatoes for two whole years! There's got to be something else this summer, the way there used to be! I can't stand just tomatoes!"

Nathan turned the horse and plow for another furrow, and Mary Ann went indoors. It was Friday — catch-up day. There were doughnuts to fry, some left-over ironing to do, clothes to mend. She must not be loitering in the front yard, dreaming of gardens.

It was a beautiful morning. She left the side door open as she worked, and caught the flicker's message as he paused in the top of the elm-tree on his way from meadow to pasture. A song-sparrow perched on the hitching-post outside the door looked at Mary Ann, and sang and sang. The crocuses opened in the sun.

When noon brought Nathan home, dinner was ready for him, and Mary Ann was waiting with a fresh apron over her blue dress and a lace-trimmed white tie at her neck. The tablecloth was turned, and there were fresh napkins. The scalloped potatoes were brown and steaming, the cold ham cut in the thinnest of slices, and the pie that Nathan liked best graced the center of the table.

Nathan grunted a gruff appreciation as he sat down.

"Plowin's extra hard," he said, "when a man's been lay in* by all winter. But the east meadow '11 be done by sundown if there ain't no hitch in things. Then I'll get around to the gardens, A farmer can't plant too much these war-times,"

"Things look good in the front yard," vouchsafed Mary Ann. "I was out there between-times this morning,"

"That tomato-patch is too good a piece to waste," Nathan observed as he helped himself to potatoes. "I ain't goin' to fool with any more tomatoes this year, and I 'ain't just decided what to put in there. What d'ye think.?"

Mary Ann started- It was not often that her husband asked her advice. This was not the way in which she had planned to make her proposal concerning the ground formerly dedicated to tomatoes; but the time for such a proposal had evidently come. She winced a little as she looked at Nathan, like a child who expects to be hurt.

"I was hopin'Y* she said, "there could be some flowers in one o* the patches. I'd thought o* marigolds* We wouldn't be put out a mite for seeds. Mother sent me some last year from the old bed at home."

Only a mouth full of ham had allowed her to finish her suggestion* Nathan swallowed as hastily as possible*

"Flowers!" 3 he said, scornfully. "You ain't mentionin' flowers in these war-times! I don't know what the guv'-ment would say to that when it's urg'in* us to use every spare bit o' land for food. What's the use o' stick in* food-savin* cards up in the windows like you've been do in* when you ain't will in' to give up havin' a few flowers? Ain't lilacs and syringas and those red things enough, I'd like to know,

without goin' contrary to the guve'ment?"

"I don't think the government ought to ask us not to plant any flowers," Mary Ann remonstrated, quietly, " Besides, I don't believe it means not to have any at all*" She was surprised at the sound of her own voice, and she was more surprised as it continued, "There's some things, Nathan, besides eatin* and drinkin'. As for the beds there by the fence, there wa'n't any war two years ago when you planted tomatoes, and there wa'n't any war last year till after you had 'em started*"

Nathan finished his dinner in amazed silence. Then he took his hat and went toward the meadow* Mary Ann washed the dishes and spread the towels in the sun. Then she sat down in the bay- window which looked alike on crocuses and lilac-bushes* Nathan's shirts needed buttons, and his socks darning* Her work -basket was piled high. Mary Ann took a napkin from the sideboard and spread it over the basket. It was an extra-large napkin — one of her best for rare guests — and it quite hid the gray wool of Nathan's socks and the drab of his shirts. She thought whimsically of the sacrament-table at church with its covered, holy things.

Then she drew from its brown wrap- pet the seed-catalogue which had come the day before, and settled herself for the afternoon*

" Leastways they never put vegetables on the cover, in spite o the govern- ment," she said to herself.

The cover was a flaming pageant of color. Pink and purple asters looked down upon stalks of blue larkspur with a singular disregard of position; pansies smiled at yellow snapdragons; and all were framed by a green trellis laden with crimson rambfers* Mary Ann dtew her breath quickly* She loved color. To her it was the greatest miracle of God. Secretly she cherished the fancy that people were its embodiment, and that thoughts, if they could be seen, would be rays of light and color.

She turned the pages expectantly. "Last year," she said to herself, "there was a whole page just of them."

She found them on page 300. The seed-cataloguers were conserving by repetition. The page was the same in color and design as that of the year before. Mary Ann knew because she had looked many times and long at that cut from the previous catalogue before deciding to make it the frontispiece of a child's scrap-book. Marigolds of the Giant African and Dwarf French varie- ties reigned supreme on page 300, Yel- low, golden, orange, red-brown, they blazea before her eyes, Mary Ann saw them as they had been before the fence beds were sacrificed. Then they had flamed in the sunlight, nodded through the fence palings, glowed in .the mist of rainy days, and braved the first frosts of November* When she was a girl they had grown in her home garden, and she had carried away a box of them on the day she married Nathan.

She kept her finger in page 300, and turned back to it now and then as she examined the others. Finally she propped the catalogue against the basket where she could see it as she worked, folded the napkin, and began on Na- than's socks.

That evening between supper and bedtime Nathan turned over the soil in the fence beds; but he said nothing to Mary Ann about the planting of it. That announcement came three days later upon the receipt of a long envelope from Washington.

"Guve'ment ain't sendin' out so many seeds as usual," he said to Mary Ann, as he examined the contents

of the envelope, "But they've sent a kind o' trial package here. 'New Summer Vegetables, Try in a Small Place/ it says. Them fence plots will be a handy spot for these, ana it 'll be interesting for you to see what comes up."

He finished in a conciliatory tone, as though he were making a concession to Mary Ann.

"There's little packages inside the big one," he continued, holding some small envelopes in his big hand. "And they ain't marked at all — kind o' surprise- pack age-like/* He opened the envelopes one by one and peered at their contents. "Some of 'em's clear enough. These here are carrots, all right, and these look somethin' like 'em — a different kind, I reckon. Them's cucumbers in that envelope, though they ain't my kind. But TU be durned if I know about the others. Probably some o' that fancy stuff the seed-catalogues put out to fool us farmers."

Mary Ann stood behind Nathan's chair and looked absently at the seeds. Dismay had filled her heart at the announcement regarding the fence beds. She was almost tempted to beg for tomatoes. They blossomed at least. And then as swiftly as the prophesied end of all things there flashed into her mind the means by which she might answer her own prayer. Even as it came, Mary Ann wondered if Satan ever granted petitions. These ways and means were assuredly not from God,

"Well," she heard Nathan concluding, "I don' know as I'd fool with 'em any other time, I'm not strong on new discoveries, like some farmers. But I'll give 'em a try this year on account o' the guve'ment. 'Twon't hurt nothin', and that land ain't good for much else."

The beds were planted the very next evening. Mary Ann went with Nathan and held the seeds. At her suggestion they divided the contents of the packets so that each bed was planted in equality and precision. Nathan placed the seeds for permanent growth. There was always waste in transplanting.

The spring fulfilled all prophecies. It came early and it stayed. The crocuses bloomed and withered; dandelions studded the roadsides; the seeds by the fence swelled and burst. Nathan was too much occupied with the more utilitarian gardening to bother much about that in the front yard; but Mary Ann haunted the place like a troubled spirit. Every daring, twin-leafed weed that came from the earth made a queer clutch in her throat. At night she was prone to dream that the front yard was piled high with vegetables born of the soil and of Nathan's surprise packet.

It was on a Thursday morning that, upon her anxious scrutiny of the beds, she saw that the earth was broken as though an army of infinitesimal moles had been at work. Here and there tiny, pale, hook-like plants, not yet strong enough to raise their heads, were visible. The sun was bright, the earth moist. By evening there would be rows of green growing things.

Mary Ann returned to the house and placed in readiness a certain pink cup which she drew from the recesses of the pantry cupboard. Her chin had become determined and her step purposeful. When Nathan came in to dinner and chanced to ask about the front-yard garden, she was ready for him.

"There's some few just showin' up," she said, "but not many,"

Friday Nathan worked in the meadow. Saturday, much to Mary Ann's anxiety, he chose to "putter round" the stable. He cleaned harnesses, washed wagons, and did some odds and ends of carpentering. Mary Ann was uneasy lest he should examine the fence beds where the tiny plants, warmed by two days of sun, were becoming strong and vigorous; but he did not.

That evening he went to the Grange. Mary Ann got out his second-best suit and a clean shirt. She also trimmed his hair a bit and saw that the part was straight* Then from the half-open side door she watched him out of the yard as she had done for thirty years.

She estimated the time he would take to reach the Grange Hall. When such time had elapsed, she went into the shed adjoining the kitchen and brought back the lantern. She lit it with fingers that trembled a little. Then she took the pink cup from the pantry cupboard* Her heart startled her by its own beating. Though to be alone was necessary for the accomplishment of her purpose* she began to be afraid of loneliness.

"It's because I ain't really alone," she said to herself with her hand on the door-knob. "Witnesses always follow them that sin/ 1

She opened the side door — the wide gate to her way of destruction— -and closed it softly behind her. Then she followed the path by the lilacs — now casting tiny leaf-shadows in the April moon — to the front of the house. There was no fear of passers-by. The Perkins' farm marked the end of the road.

Bending over the bed at the left of the gravel walk, she studied its orderly rows of new-born plants. Twelve rows to a bed— twenty-four in all. They were sturdy little plants, she thought* very much at home already. For a moment her courage failed her and she stood up- right, staring into the darkness above the meadow. But the thought of the rank, characterless vegetables which, but for her, would fill the fence beds decided her once and for all. She began deliberately to pull up the seedlings of every other row, placing them in the pocket of her apron. She did the same to the bed on the right of the walk. Then, the way cleared, she deepened the rows and planted the seeds from the pink cup*

She did not put the lantern on the ground, but held it in her left hand, where it hovered like a great glow-worm born before its time. The night was sweet with spring fragrance — the fragrance of freshly turned soil, of dew upon new leaves, of April mist. It was still except for the rustle of little poplar leaves and the thumping of Mary Ann's heart. Strangely enough, her sense of guilt left her and became lost in the beauty of the night. She was no longer conscious of the cloud of witnesses that encompass those who sin. They, too, were hidden in the April mist. Her conscience and her soul separated. The first stayed with the woman whom Nathan knew — the woman who, Mary Ann almost thought, was still darning socks by the table beneath the light. Only a soul was here in the garden — her soul that loved light and color and was strangely capable of guilt.

The last thought still clung to her when she had hung up the lantern, burned the contents of her apron pocket, and sat down with her mending in the chair which she had half expected to find occupied. She had deceived Nathan. She intended to lie to him if necessary. Therefore, by all the dictates of the church, the Bible, her conscience, and her bringing-up, she was sinning. She had been sinning ever since the day when her evil purpose had been born.

To her knowledge, Mary Ann had never consciously sinned before, Satan had had few avenues of entrance into her life* She had expected to find him a terrible companion who would allow her no peace, and she had accepted the penalty* Instead her sin — for sin it must be — was indissolubly connected with beautiful things — mystery, stillness, ecstasy* She had expected to repent. Instead, repentance seemed an ugly thing, to be dreaded rather than sought.

That night as she lay wakeful while Nathan slept she saw the marigolds — not blighted by God's

disapproval, but glowing under His smile.

"Seems to me,** observed Nathan, coming in at noon a few days later, "that I planted twelve rows of them surprise vegetables to a bed. There ain't but six showin'. *Twan't twelve in all, was it?"

° No," said Mary Ann, imperturbably, as she dished up the boiled dinner. "I'm pretty sure there was twelve in each. It's possible that some o' the seeds take longer 'n others to start."

"Maybe," Nathan agreed, "I 'ain't looked at 'em before,'*

It was two weeks before he looked again* The larger gardens demanded attention, and the front yard was not generally frequented, even on Sundays.

"HI be durned," he observed to Mary Ann, on the occasion of his second inspection, "if the guve'ment 'ain't sent a mess o' carrot seed* Leastways them new rows up look like carrots, or some- thin* near akin, though I must say I never knew 'em to take so long before. Carrots is cheap enough fodder for any one. Maybe that's what they mean by sendin* so many/*

"Maybe," acquiesced Mary Ann, startled by apparent answers to peti- tions never framed.

May went as June had gone, only leaving behind a sense of greater com- pletion. Mary Ann would have liked to hold it forever, and grieved when the children came for lilacs to carry in the Memorial procession. But once June had come, with a west wind and the gold of awakened buttercups, she was con- tent. The assurance of June gave her courage just as April's uncertainty had troubled her. The peonies lit their scarlet fires and contributed added bravery. She heard them clamoring For the joy of temporary things, and did not fear when the marigolds, aided by her secret trowelings and extra refreshment, threatened to obscure the surprise- package vegetables.

Nathan was busy with a new pasture fence, and gave little thought to his strictly patriotic venture. But one Sun- day morning, as he and Mary Ann came from church, he stopped before the fence plots. Mary Ann stopped, too, strangely calm. The peonies nodded reassuringly.

"I can t make out them things, no- how," said Nathan. "They ain't car- rots — they're too dark green and stalky. They're half-fillin* the beds and hidin' all the rest. It don't seem 's though there was as many more seeds o* one kind as that. I snum it don't."

Mary Ann was silent. Once she started a little as Nathan's clumsy fin- gers touched the largest marigold. She knew that by parting the feathery leaves ever so little he might discover a bud concealed there.

"They don't look Like vegetables to me," he continued. "They ain't squat enough, unless they're some new kind of asparagras, and that *d be a luxury. The guve'ment wouldn't do that."

The arrival of a neighbor cut short Nathan's reflections. Two days later he left for a week up-country before haying should begin. He was thinking of buy- ing some sheep — a profitable investment, as he reckoned.

Mary Ann and the sun joined partner- ship. The marigold bud left its hiding- place and acquired a stem. Mary Ann spent every spare moment in the front yard. The peonies had become her allies. Like them,

she had chosen wick- edness.

Nathan, returning from up-country, chose the front gate as befitting his second-best suit and air of sophistica- tion. The marigold, orange with the soft richness of velvet, stared at him through the fence palings. Mary Ann was on the front steps.

Nathan returned the marigold's stare. His bewildered eyes swept the plots and saw other buds on other strong stems. His face grew sheepish as he went tow- ard Mary Ann,

"Well, I'll be durned!" he said, slowly, "I guess that guve'ment pack- age was a surprise one ! I guess maybe it means for folks to have some flowers, after all."

As" he came up the steps, a great ten- derness swept over Mary Ann, She was grateful for Nathan's stupidity — thank- ful that he never once imagined the pos- sibility of her deceit. She had intended to tell him everything. In the days of his absence she had spent hours in med- itation, sometimes by the marigolds, more often in bed at night. She had been troubled even beyond expectation — not by her sin, but by her love of it. Once she had put on her bonnet and shawl and started for the minister's. She would ask him if sin were always hateful to the sinner. But she did not get beyond the front gate. She knew he would tell her what was not true.

Yet, if she could not kill her love of sin, she had concluded that at least she could suffer punishment. Nathan's scorn and disappointment, the discom- fort of living constantly under his dis- approval, would be bitter pncance } but it might still her conscience. She had meant to confess it all. Instead she had acquiesced in his belief that the govern- ment intended flowers.

She kissed him as he reached the door — an unwonted caress. There were tears in her eyes and voice when she said it had been lonesome without him. She hurried into the kitchen to stir up the biscuits he liked. When she called him to dinner he was in the front yard, still wondering at the government's surprise.

" Didn't you bring a box o* them things when you first come here with me? he asked. What he they, any- way ? The smell ain't much/

"Yes," said Mary Ann, "I brought them. They're marigolds, Nathan/

Nathan began his supper, and Mary Ann watched him tenderly. He looked tired » and she did not like the way his hand shook when he raised his cup of tea. He was young no longer, she told herself. He needed better care than she had ever given him.

They went to bed early, and Nathan soon fell asleep. He had walked through miles of pasture in the interests of sheep. Mary Ann could not sleep. She was still marveling at the sweetness of sin.

"Nathan/* she whispered once. But he did not hear.

Mary Ann had been taught simply. She knew what was the wages of sin. She had always been familiar with the fruits of the Spirit, and St, Paul's eulogy of them. She had believed in ultimate rewards and punishments, and in the revelation of all wrongs at the judgment seat. Why, then, had her first deliberate sin brought such joy?

She closed her eyes and thought of the joy to come. Now there was one mari- gold. Next week there would be dozens. In two weeks, hundreds. Disks of pure old, runaway stars, tongues of red ame — they would riot in the front yard. She would place a bow! of them on her mother's table in the front hall, and they would see themselves in its polished sur- face. In November they would nod to her long after the frosts had come. They would be her life — in spite of the wages of sin*

Mary^ Ann turned to sleep.

"I don't believe a word of it!" she whispered, defiantly. "No one will ever be punished for joy!"

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THE TREASURE OF SACRAMENTO NICK.

By Guy Boothby.

From Windsor Magazine, Vol 8, 1897-98

AWAY on the northern most coast of Australia lies a little world all by itself, and unlike anything else to be found in the whole immemorial East. Its chief centre is in Torres Straits, where the majority of the inhabitants employ themselves in pearl-fishing, gathering bêche-de-mer and tortoise-shell, and generally in accumulating those gigantic fortunes of which one hears so much and sees so little.

Walking the streets of Thursday Island, the smallest of the group, yet the centre of commerce and the seat of such government as the Colony of Queensland can afford it, you will be struck with the number of nationalities represented. Dwelling together, if not in unity, certainly in unison, are Caucasians and Mongolians, Ethiopians and Malayans, John Chinaman living cheek by jowl with the barbarian

Englishman, Cingalee with Portuguese, Frenchman with Kanaka—all prejudices alike forgotten in the one absorbing struggle for the unchanging British sovereign. On the verandahs of the hotels sit continually men who talk with the familiarity of old friends about the uttermost parts of the earth, and whose lives are mainly spent in places to which the average man never goes nor dreams of going. If you are a good listener they will tell you many things worth knowing; and towards midnight you will feel stealing over you a hazy conviction that the nineteenth century is as yet unborn, and that you are listening to the personal narrative of Sinbad the Sailor in an unexpurgated form.

One afternoon, as I was sitting in my verandah watching the China mail-boat steam to her anchorage, and wondering if I had energy enough to light a third cheroot, I felt my arm touched. Turning, I discovered a little Solomon boy, about ten years old, attired in an ancient pair of hunting-breeches, and grinning from ear to ear. Having succeeded in attracting my attention, he handed me a letter. It was from my friend McBain, the manager of a pearling station on an adjacent island, and set forth the welcome fact that he would be pleased to see me on a matter of some importance, if I could spare the time to dine with him that evening. There was nothing I could spare more easily or more willingly.

Once comfortably seated in the verandah, McBain explained his reason for sending to me. "You'll think me mad, but I've got a curiosity here that I want to examine before anyone else gets hold of him."

"Black or white?" I asked, with but little interest, for we lived in a land of human curiosities.

"White."

"Nationality?"

"Cosmopolitan, I should fancy."

"Profession?"

"Adventurer, with a marvellous big A."

"And hailing from——?"

"Well, he doesn't seem to know himself. One of my luggers took him out of an open boat about two degrees west of the Ladrões."

"But he surely knows how he got into the boat? Men don't go pleasure trips across oceans without knowing whence they started. Hasn't he anything to say for himself?"

"That's just what I want you to hear. Either the man's a superhuman liar, or else he's got a secret of the biggest thing on earth. We'll have him up to-night, and you shall judge for yourself."

When dinner was over we took ourselves and our cigars into the cool verandah, and for half an hour or so sat smoking and talking of many things. Then a footstep crunched upon the path, and a tall, thin man stood before us.

McBain rose and wished him "Good evening," as he did so pushing a chair into such a position that I could see his face. "I beg your pardon, but I don't think you told me your name last night."

"Sir, my name is Nicodemus B. Patten, of Sacramento City, State of California, U.S.A.—most times called Sacramento Nick."

"Well, Mr. Patten, let me introduce you to a friend who is anxious to hear the curious story you told me last night. Will you smoke?"

Gravely bowing to me, he selected a cheroot, lit it, and blew the smoke luxuriously through his nose. The lamp-light fell full and fair upon his face, and instinctively I began to study it. It was a remarkable countenance, and, in spite of its irregularity of feature, contained a dignity of expression which rather disconcerted me. There were evident traces of bodily and mental suffering in the near past, but it was neither the one nor the other which had stamped the lines that so much puzzled me. After satisfying myself on certain other points, I begged him to begin. He did so without hesitation or previous thought.

"Gentlemen, before I commence my story, let me tell you that when first the things I am going to tell you of came about, there were three of us: Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S.A.; James Dance, of London, England; and Nicodemus B. Patten, of Sacramento City, now before you. I reckon most folks would have called us adventurers, for we'd ferreted into nearly every corner of the globe. Snakes alive! but I've seen things in my time that would fairly stagger even you, and I guess my story of to-night ain't the least curious of 'em.

"Perhaps you don't remember the junk that fell foul of the Bedford Castle nigh upon three years ago, when she was four days out from Singapore?"

I remembered the circumstance perfectly. It was an act of flagrant piracy which had made some noise at the time; and I had also a faint recollection of having been told that white men were suspected of being mixed up in it. On being asked if he knew anything of the matter, he said—

"Well, I don't say we did, mind you, but I had a suspicion we were in China waters at the time. But bless you, in those days there were few places and few things that we hadn't a finger in. Understand, I am telling you this because I don't want to sail under false colours, and also because such work is all over now; the firm's smashed up, and we'll never go on the long trail again.

"Two years ago, for certain reasons not necessary to mention, we wanted to lay by for a while, so, bringing up at Batavia fixed right on to the Nederlander. Java's a one-horse place for business purposes, but if you know the ropes—well, there's not a better place in the world to hide in.

"Now, gentlemen both, you may take it from me that there never was such a chap for browsing about among niggers, finding out what was doing and if there was anything to be made, as Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee, U.S.A. In the first place, he could patter any lingo from Chinese to Malay with a tongue that'd talk round the devil himself; and when he suspicioned a nigger had anything worth knowing—well, he'd just freeze to that charcoal sketch till he fairly got it out of him. Rigged out in native dress and properly coloured, he could pass in anywhere. It was he who found out the thing that ruined us, brought me here, and left Jim and himself feeding the fishes a thousand fathoms deep.

"Directly we arrived in Batavia he began hanging round the native quarter, making himself mighty agreeable for some particular information he wanted. He was away for two or three days; then, one night, as Dance and me were smoking on the piazza, he came striding up the path in the devil's own hurry. 'Boys!' says he in a whisper, 'I'm on it, up to the hilt, the biggest and the all-firedest stroke of good fortune we've hit yet! I'm going fantee to-night, so keep your weather eyes lifted, and when I say

come, come right away.' With that he went to his room, and we could hear him rummaging about in his trunks.

"A bit later a native fruit hawker came round the corner, bowing and scraping towards us. We told him to clear out, but he commenced a pitiful yarn, all the time pushing his baskets closer to us. 'Fine duriens and the sweetest of mangosteens, if the Presence will only buy!' But the big night-watchman had caught sight of him, and came trundling down the piazza. You can reckon our astonishment when the hawker said, 'How is it, boys? Do you think they'll savee? Keep your kits packed, and be prepared to trek directly you get the word from me.' Here the watchman came up. 'On the word of a poor man, the duriens are freshly plucked, and the mangosteens hung upon the trees this morning.' We refused to buy, and he went away, crying his fruit, towards the native quarter.

"For two or three days not a shadow of a sign came from him. Then one of those Chinese hawkers came into the square with two coolies carrying his goods, and as soon as we set eyes on the second nigger we recognised Milwaukee, and stood by to take his message in whatever form it might come. Pulling up at our chairs, the Chinkey told his men to set down their loads, himself coming across to us with a tray of fans, scents, and what not; but seeing Milwaukee had a packet of slippers in his hands, we only wanted slippers. The merchant sings out, and he brings 'em over, handing one pair to Dance and another to me. We stepped inside to try them on, and, as we expected, in one of the shoes was a letter neatly stowed away. I forget now how it went, but it was to the effect that he had found out all he wanted to know, and that we were to meet him at eight on the Singapore Wharf at Tanjong Priok, bringing no kit save our revolvers.

"After squaring things at the hotel, and destroying what was dangerous in our baggage, we trekked for the Priok just as dusk was falling. Sharp at eight we were waiting on the wharf where the Messageric boats lie, and wondering what the deuce was going to happen. Inside of ten minutes a native boat came pulling up the river, and as it passed us the rower sneezed twice very sharp and sudden. It was an old signal, and Dance gave the return. The boatman hitches right on to the steps and comes ashore.

"'Good boys,' says he, very quiet and careful; 'up to time—that's right. Now to business. D'ye see that schooner lying outside the breakwater? Well, she sails at daylight. I put the skipper and mate ashore not ten minutes ago, and they're to return in an hour. There's only three chaps aboard, and it's our business to cut her out before the others come back. D'ye understand?'

"'But what d'ye reckon to do then, Milwaukee?' I asked, for it seemed a risky game, just for the sake of a mangy Dutch trader.

"'Never you mind now; when I do tell you, you'll say it's worth the candle. Come, jump in here, and I'll pull you aboard.'

"The harbour was as quiet as the sea out yonder; a Dutch man-of-war lay under the wing of the breakwater, and a Sourabaya mail-boat to the left of her. We passed between them, down towards the lighthouse and out into the open. Outside there was a bit of a sea running, but Milwaukee was always hard to beat, and at last we managed to get alongside. Somebody, most likely the anchor-watch, caught our painter, and took a turn in it, saying in Dutch, 'You're back early. Mynheer.' By the time he twigged his mistake we were aboard, and Dance had clapped a stopper on his mouth. The others were below, and I reckon you'd have laughed if you could have seen the look on their faces when, after Milwaukee's thumping on the foc'sle, they turned out to find their craft in other hands. However, they soon saw what was up, and reckoned it was no use making fools of themselves. Then Milwaukee went to the wheel,

singing out to get sail on her and stand by to slip the cable. We knew our business, and in less than twenty minutes were humming down the coast a good ten knots an hour.

"As soon as the course was set and everything going smooth, Milwaukee made right aft to where Dance was steering. 'I guess it's time,' says he, 'to let you into the secret. You know me and I know you, which is enough said between pards. We've been in many good things together, but this is going to be the biggest we've sighted yet. It doesn't mean hundreds of pounds, but thousands, millions maybe; anyhow, enough to set us three up as princes all the world over.'

"Sounds well; but how did you come to know of it?' we asked, a bit doubtful like.

"Before answering, he took a squint at the card and then aloft. 'Keep her as she goes, Jim. How did I come to hear of it? How does a man hear anything? Why, by going to the places and among the folk who talk. I got wind of it months ago, but never came across anything straight out till I went fantee among the niggers. Losh, boys, if you want yarns to raise your scalp, go down town and smoke among the darkies; I've done it, and you bet I know. There was one old chap who used to drop in every night, and smoke, and chew, and spit, and lie, till you couldn't rest. From his talk, he'd once done a bit in our line, and his great sweat was about an island he'd been to fifty years ago, where there's an old Portugee treasure-ship aground, chock full of gold, diamonds, rubies, and pearls, all waitin' for the man as'll go to get 'em. At first I reckoned he lied, for how he got there he didn't rightly remember; but he swore he found the ship, and was in the act of broaching her cargo, when the natives came and sent him back to sea again. What he did get, except a bloomin' old dagger, was stolen from him in Saigon. Directly I sighted that instrument, I began to guess there might be something in his yarn after all; for, where-ever he got it, it was a genuine Portugee's weapon of a couple of hundred years back. Well, as any lubber knows, the Portugee sailed these seas two hundred years ago; why shouldn't one of 'em have been wrecked with all her cargo and never been heard of since? Answer me that! Anyhow, you bet I froze to that nigger.

"At first he played cunning, and seemed to suspicion I was after something. So one night I got him alone, and—d'ye remember Hottentot Joe in the Kimberley?—well, p'raps I played the same game on this old cove, and when he was sound off I began to pump him all I knew. The old chap had been sailing pretty near to the truth, but still he'd kept a bit up his sleeve; however, I got that bit, and here's his chart as near as I can fix it.'

"So saying, he drew out a paper and held it to the binnacle. Then putting his finger on a coloured mark, he went on: 'It's a bit hazy steering after we get here, inasmuch as, being a nigger, he couldn't keep proper reckoning. But once among these islands, I guess we can't be far off the right one, and to find it we'll search every mudbank in the Pacific. Accordin' to his fixin' it has a big mountain climbing from its centre, with a monster white rock halfway up, shaped like a man's fist. In a bee-line with the rock there's a creek running inland, big enough to float a seventy-four; follow that creek up a mile or so and you come to a lake, and on the other side of that lake's where the old barge ought to be. Now, what do you think?'

"What do I think? Why, I think, Milwaukee, you are a fool to have brought us on such a rotten chase, and we're bigger fools to have followed you. The island, I guess, never existed, and we'll get stretched for this boat by the first warship that sights us. But now we are here, we'd better make the best of it. What do you say, Jim?'

"I stand with you,' said Dance, and that settled it.

"To make a long story short, we sailed that hooker right on end for nigh upon three weeks. The wind was mostly favourable, the boat had a slippery pair of heels, and the stores, considering they were laid in by Dutchmen, were none too bad. Only one thing was wrong to my thinking, and that was the supply of grog aboard. If I had my way there'd have been a gimlet through the lot; but Milwaukee was skipper, and wouldn't hear of it.

"Tuesday, the thirteenth of January, saw the tether of the old darkie's chart, so we held a bit of a palaver, and settled to go on cruising about the islands, which we were picking up and dropping every day.

"You folk who live inside this rot-gut reef don't know what islands are. Out there, you see them on all sides, pushing their green heads up to watch the ships go by, with the air so warm, the sea so green, and the sky so blue that it's like living in a new world. Birds of every colour fly across your bows all day, and in the hush of night, lying out on deck, you can hear the water-falls trickling ashore, and now and again the crash of a big tree falling in the jungle.

"One forenoon, while I was at the wheel, Milwaukee and Jim Dance fell to quarrelling. It started over nothing, and would have come to nothing but for that tarnation liquor. I sung out to them to stop, but it was no use, so, leaving the hooker to look after herself, I went for'ard. Before I could reach him, the skipper had drawn a revolver, and I heard Jim cry, 'For Gawd's sake don't shoot!' Then there was a report, and sure enough Dance fell dead.

"Can you picture it? Overhead the blue sky, a few white clouds, and the canvas just drawing; on the deck, poor Jim lying as if asleep, and Milwaukee leaning against the foremast staring at him. Seein' there was no use in keepin' the body aboard, I called one of the Dutchmen aft and told him to fix it up in a bit of canvas. Then together we hove it overboard; it sank with a dull plunge, and so we lost the first of our mess.

"Milwaukee being too drunk to take his trick at the wheel, I stood it for him. A bit before sundown he comes on deck, looking terrible fierce and haggard. Rolling aft, he says with a voice solemn as a judge, 'Sacramento Nick, you're a good man and true. On your Bible oath, did I shoot James Dance, mariner?'

"Seeing what was passing in his mind, I said simply, 'You did.'

""Was I drunk, being in charge of this vessel at the time?'

""You were.'

""That is your word and deed, so help you, God?'

""Ay, ay.'

""Well, that being so, no more need be said. It's the sentence of the court. Shipmate, your hand.'

"We shook hands, and he turned to the taffrail. Before I knew what he was about, he had leaped upon it and plunged into the sea. He only rose once; then the white belly of a shark showed uppermost, and never again did I see Esdras W. Dyson, of Milwaukee City, Wisconsin.

"Three days later, when I was too dog-tired to keep watch, those cut-throat Dutchmen mutinied and

sent me adrift in the long boat, with one week's provisions and a small beaker of water.

"Strangers, have you ever been cast adrift? I can see you haven't; well, hope that your luck don't run that way. Fortunately it was fair weather, and I was able to rig a bit of a sail; but how long I was cruising among those islands, drat me if I know. Being ignorant, so to speak, of my position, one way was as another, and when short of provisions I'd just go ashore, pick fruit, fill my beaker, and then set sail again. One warm afternoon I found myself abreast of the largest island I'd seen yet. From its centre rose a high mountain, and, strike me dead if I lie! half way up that last was a big white rock, shaped like a man's fist! When I saw it I was clean staggered; I stood up and stared till I could stare no longer. It was just as if I'd stumbled by mistake on the very island we'd set out to seek. By tacking, I managed to get right under its lee, and there, sure enough, between two high banks, was the entrance to a fairish river. Furling the sail, I took to my oars and pulled inside. The sun was close on down by this time, and I was dog-tired; so as nothing could be gained by bursting the boilers, when, as far as I knew, all the future was afore me, I anchored where I was, and stayed in my boat till morning.

"You bet, as soon as it was light I pushed on again, bringing out on a slap-up lake perhaps a mile long by half a mile across. The water was as clear as crystal and as smooth as glass. Making for a plain of dazzling white sand at the farthest end, I beached my boat and prepared to start explorations. Then, just as her nose grounded, my eyes caught sight of a big, creeper-covered mass lying all alone in the centre of the plain. May I never know a shieve-hole from a harness-cask again, if it wasn't an old galleon of the identical pattern to be seen in the Columbus' picter-books. Trembling like a palsied monkey, I jumped out and ran for it.

"She may have been close on a hundred tons burden, but it was impossible to calculate her size exactly for the heap of stuff that covered her. How she ever got on to that plain, and why she hadn't rotted clean away during the two hundred years or more she must have lain there, are things I can't explain. Anyhow, I didn't stay to puzzle 'em out then, but set to work hunting for a way to get inside her. From the main-deck seemed to be the best course, and to reach that I started hacking at the blooming creepers. It was harder work than you'd think, for they'd spliced and twisted 'emselves into cables, and a jack-knife was about as much use on 'em as a toothpick. When night came I'd done a big day's work, and had only just got a footing on her deck.

"Next morning I went at it again, and by midday had the satisfaction of standing before the cuddy entrance. Again I felt the same blooming funk creeping over me; but when I remembered the treasure, I said good-bye to that, and placed my shoulder against the door. It crumbled away and fell all a heap upon the deck, and when the dust had passed I found myself at the entrance of a small alley-way leading into the saloon. I entered it, stepping gingerly, but had only gone a few steps before the deck suddenly gave way, and I found myself disappearing with a crash into the lower regions. The fall was a sight bigger than I liked, but it served a purpose, for my weight on landing started a plank and brought a glimmer of light into the darkness.

"Finding I was not hurt, I fell to groping for a way out again; then I noticed the rottenness of the timbers, and determined to enlarge the light I had just made. The two kicks and a shove brought a flood of sunshine pouring in, and a horrible sight met my eyes. I was standing beside an old-fashioned bed-place on which lay (you may believe me or not) the mummified body of a man stretched full out and hanging on to the stanchions like grim death. He was not alone, for in the centre of the cabin, clutching at a heavy table, was another chap, also perfectly preserved, half standing, with his feet braced against the thick cross-bars and his shrivelled parchment face, with its staring eyes turned towards me, grinning like a poisoned cat. My scalp seemed to lift and my in'ards to turn to water. Letting out one yell, I

clambered for the open air.

"Outside all was sunshine, blue sky and bright colour, and, as if to set off what I had just left, a big butterfly came hovering towards me. In a few minutes my presence of mind returned, and I began to laugh at the idea of Sacramento Nick being afeared of dead men; so back I went in search of further mysteries. Again I entered the cuddy and lowered myself into the under-cabin, but this time I was prepared for anything. The treasure-guard stared, but said nothing.

"While I was wondering how I'd best set about my search, a smart breeze came whistling in, caught the figure at the table, disengaged his hold, and brought his old carcass with a dry rattle to the floor. With his fall a small piece of metal rolled to my feet, and picking it up I found it to be a key of real curious shape and workmanship. Fired with my discoveries, I slipped across to try it on the first of the chests I saw ranged round the cabin, when to my astonishment I found it open. Somebody had been there before me; perhaps I was too late. All of a sweat, I looked in, but 'twas too dark; I tried to pull the whole chest towards the light, but it was a main sight too heavy. Then I plunged my hand in, and—great Jehoshaphat, how I yelled! Clutching what I could hold, I dashed across the cabin, up into the light, and throwing myself upon the ground, spread what I had brought before me. It took less than a second to see that they were diamonds, and by all the stars and stripes, diamonds of the first water! There they lay, winking and blinking at me and the sun, and for the first, time I began to savee my amazing wealth. For the minute I was clean, stark, staring mad. I closed my eyes, and wondered if, when I opened them again, I should find it all a dream; but no, the beauties were there, looking brighter and even larger than before.

"Gentlemen, it's strange how the habits and precautions of civilisation linger with a man even in the queerest places. For while not twenty yards from where I stood was greater wealth than I or fifty men could ever spend, I found myself fearful of losing one, picking each gem up with scrupulous care and securing it inside my jumper. The next box was locked, so I tried the key. In spite of age and rust the wards shot back and the cover lifted. Again I felt the touch of stones, and again seizing a handful I went back into the light. This time they were rubies—Burmese rubies, my experience told me, and not a tarnation flaw in one of 'em. For a second time I carefully picked 'em up and was hiding 'em as before, when I happened to look round. Dash my buttons if I was alone! On all sides were niggers regarding me with considerable attention. I sprang to my feet and felt for my revolver. Fool that I was, I had left it in the boat. Seeing that I was aware of their presence, they closed in on me, and as they did so I took stock of 'em. They were unlike other South Sea natives, being of better build and but little darker than myself. True, they were rigged out in a short loin cloth not unlike tappa, but they carried neither spear nor shield. When I saw this I was for showing fight, but soon gave that idea up; they were too many for me.

"After a few minutes' inspection they began to march me through the forest in a westerly direction, all the time talking a lingo that seemed curiously familiar. Just upon sunset we entered a large clearing, on which stood a fair-sized native village, and I thought as I looked at it that, if ever I got out of this mess and turned to blackbirding, I'd know where to come for niggers. It contained perhaps fifty huts, all built of wood, and with conical-shaped grass roofs. A trim garden ran down the centre, at the farthest end of which stood the largest and the most slap-up building of the lot. As soon as we hove in sight a crowd came out to meet us, and in the middle of hundreds of yelling darkies I was marched up to the big house. The old chief, who had been bossing affairs with the swagger of a New York policeman, told me to wait, while he carried his carcass up some steps and disappeared. After a little while he returned, and signified that I should follow him.

"When I got inside I had plenty of time to look about me, for it must have been full half an hour before anyone came. Then some grass curtains were drawn aside, and what looked like a man entered. I say looked like, because I ain't really clear in my mind as to what he was; anyway, I shouldn't be far from the mark in saying he was quite a hundred years old, and just about as deformed as he well could be. He was as white as myself, and from the antics of the chief who had fetched me to his presence, I could see that he had a great hold over the niggers. Throwing himself upon the ground, that old fool of a chief feebly wagged his toes till told to rise. Then he started explaining where he had found me and what I was doing.

"During his yarn old grandf'r, whose name I afterwards found was Don Silvio, riddled me into auger-holes with his evil little eyes; then, having ordered the chief out, he started to examine me himself. He spoke the same lingo as the niggers, a sort of bastard Portuguese, and still looking me through and through, asked, 'Stranger, how came you to this island?'

"I reckoned it best to keep the real truth from him, so said, 'I am a shipwrecked mariner, señor, and fetched here in an open boat.'

"His eyes blazed and his long, lean fingers twitched round his jewelled stick. 'And had you no thought of what treasure you might find?'

"'Señor,' said I, looking him square in the face, 'let me put it to you. Is it likely that a shipwrecked mariner would think of treasure?'

"A storm was brewing in his eyes, and I guessed it would break on me. Suddenly he yelled: 'You lie, you dog, you thief—you lie! You came for what you could steal, but nothing shall you take away, nothing, nothing—not one stone. The Fates that consumed those who came aforetime shall consume you also. Shipwreck or no shipwreck, you shall die!'

"He fell to beating a gong with his stick, and a dozen or so natives came tumbling in. They seemed to know their business, and before I had time to get in a word I was being dragged away down the street to a small and securely guarded hut, where I was pushed in and the door closed. Disliking the look of things, as soon as I recovered my breath I started hunting about for a way of escape, but that was no good. Added to my other troubles, I was just famishing, and was beginning to fix it that my end was to be starvation, when footsteps approached, the door opened, and a native girl appeared, bearing on her head two wooden dishes, which she set down before me. Being a favourite with the sex, I tried to draw her into conversation, but either she didn't understand my talk or fear had taken away her tongue; anyway, not a word would she utter. After she had left me I set to work on the food, and never before or since have I enjoyed a meal so much. Then, stretching myself on some dry reeds in a corner, I soon fell asleep.

"I was awakened in the chill grey of dawn by the entrance of the same beauty, who put down my breakfast, saying as she did so, 'White man, eat well, for at sunrise you die!' For a moment the shock cleared me out of speech; I could only sit and stare at her. She seemed to see what was going on in my mind, and, as if in comfort, added, 'Stranger, why do you fear death? It can only come once.'

"Her reasoning, though logical enough, wasn't of the kind calculated to meet my trouble, and when she had left me I started wondering if anybody in Sacramento City would ever hear of my fate, and bitterly cursing the day I set out in search of this villainous island. As I sat with my head upon my hands, the jewels I had stuck in my jumper fell to the floor and lay there taunting me with their sparkling

splendour. Howsomever, it was no use crying over spilled milk; I had brought the situation on myself, and, whatever happened, must go through with it. Suddenly my ear caught the pat of naked feet outside the cell. Then the door was unbarred and the chief entered. 'Come, white man,' he said, 'all is made ready, and the axe waits for the bare flesh!' How would you have felt in such a situation? As for myself, I put a good face on it, and resolved, since I could no longer live a free and independent American citizen, to die as such. Pity, I thought, there wasn't a band. I was led up the village, to the open plot before Don Silvio's house. It might have been the Fourth of July for the crowd that was assembled. In the centre, for my special benefit, was an object which held an awful fascination for me: a curiously carved block of wood, dull brown in colour, and on two sides much stained and worn. It didn't take me a year to understand what it meant; and you may think it strange, seeing the nature of my position, but true as gospel, I fell to wondering how my long neck would figure stretched across it.

"When I was halted I took it for granted that the work of despatching me would commence at once, but I was mistaken. The execution could not take place until the arrival of Don Silvio, and the sun was a good hour up before there was a stir in the crowd, and the withered, monkey-faced little devil came stumping towards me. If he had appeared a hundred years old in the half-dark of his house, he now looked double that age, but the fire in his eyes was as bright as ever. Hobbling to within a dozen paces of where I stood, he took thorough stock of me. Then, tapping the block with his stick, he said, 'Señor, you are about to hunt treasure in a golden country, where I trust your efforts may meet with better success. I wish you farewell' After relieving himself of this, he went to his seat; two natives raised a great grass umbrella above his head, and, all being comfortable, he gave orders for the performance to begin. A nigger stepped from the crowd and approached me, carrying in his hand an axe. Reaching the block, he signed me to kneel. I took a last look round—first at the thick jungle, then at the great mountain pushing itself up into the blue sky. After that my eyes returned to the block, and, gentlemen both, a wonderful circumstance happened. Understand me clearly! Standing on either side of it were two thin columns of palest blue smoke, maybe six feet in height. As I stared at 'em they gradually took the shapes of men, till I could make out the features of old Milwaukee and poor Jim Dance, of London Town. They seemed to be gently beckoning me and telling me not to fear. P'raps I kind of understood, for I stretched my long neck across the block without a sign of funk. I heard the cackling laugh of Don Silvio, I saw the headsman draw a step closer, his arms go up, and then I shut my eyes, and remember no more.

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"When I came to my senses I was lying on the bed of rushes in my old quarters, and the native girl before mentioned was seated beside me. On putting my hand to my head to sort of fix matters, she laughed merrily and said, 'Stranger, it is still there, but to-morrow it will certainly be gone.' Why they hadn't killed me I couldn't understand, unless it was to put me to the torture of waiting another day; anyhow, the following morning I was prepared for the guard when they came to lead me out.

"Once more the crowd was there, once more that villainous old Don kept me waiting, and once more the axe went up but failed to strike. I was respited for another day. Well, this sort of thing happened every blessed morning, till I nearly went mad with the strain of it. On the eighth day, instead of being kept in the square, I was marched straight to the Don's house. The old pirate was waiting for me, and as soon as I arrived fell to questioning me about the outer world, seeming to take an all-fired interest in such parts of my own life as I thought fit to tell him. When he had found out all he wanted he said, 'Go now; for the present you are free; but remember, if you but approach that ship by so much as half a mile, that same moment you die!' I stumbled out of his presence and down the street like a man dazed. That he had some reason for sparing my life was certain, but what it was, for the life of me, I couldn't then determine. Arriving at my hut, I threw myself upon the rushes and tried to think it out.

"That evening, a little after sundown, while walking outside the village and racking my brain for a chance of escape, an event happened which changed all my thoughts and plans. I was passing through a bit of jungle, where the fireflies were beginning to play to and fro, when I came face to face with the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, and—well, I'm a free-born American citizen, and as such the equal of any man living, but I reckon that young woman took the conceit out of me. She couldn't have been more than eighteen years of age; her skin was as white as milk, her hair and eyes of the deepest black; and when she walked it was like the sound of falling rose-leaves. Seeing me, she started with surprise, and was half inclined to run, but something seemed to tell her I wasn't particular harmful, so, overcoming her fear, she said, 'Señor, I am glad my grandfather has given you your freedom.' Her grandfather! Not being able to make it out, I said, 'Surely, miss, Don Silvio ain't your grandfather?' 'No, señor, he was my father's grandfather, but I call him so because the other is so tedious.' Perhaps my manner, as I say, didn't appear very dangerous; anyway, after this her bashfulness seemed to vanish, and we walked back to the village as comfortable as you please. She told me that it was she who had induced the old rascal to spare my life, and I reckon the look I gave her for that had something to do with the flush as spread across her face. She also let me into the risk I had run by breaking into the old galleon, which, according to her telling, was a sacred thing upon the island. She did not know how long it had lain there, but suspicioned her great grandfather had commanded it as a young man, and that all the rest who came with him were dead, a fact which, you bet, I could quite believe.

"The moon was full up before we sighted the village, and when she left me I went back to my hut in a flumux of enchantment, as much in love as the veriest schoolboy. Every day Don Silvio came to question me, and you'd better guess I did my best to corral the old chap's confidence.

"Well, each evening, as soon as the sun was down, I visited the grove beyond the village, where, sure enough, I always met the Don's great-granddaughter. Her beauty and amazing innocence so held me that I was nearly mad to make her my wife; and when I found that she reckoned to have the same liking for me, I could bear it no longer, so went right off to ask the old man for her hand. Not having the least hope of being successful, you can judge of my surprise when he promised her to me straight away, and, what's more, fixed it that the wedding should take place next day. He kept his word, and on the following morning, in the presence of all the village, she became my wife.

"The year that followed topped everything I ever knew of happiness. It slipped by in a rosy mist, and when our boy was born my cup was full. I proclaimed him American, according to the constitution of the United States, and the old Don announced a great feast in his honour. It was spread in the square, and all the village sat down to it. I can see the sight now: the shadowy outline of the mountain beyond, the great flaring torches of sweet-smelling wood, the long rows of tables, the shouts and laughter of the niggers, and at the head, between my wife and her great-grandfather, the boy in his cradle. When the feast was right at its height, the old Don rose and handed me a silver mug filled with some sweet liquor. He told me to drink to my son's health, and, suspecting no treachery, I did so. Next moment a change stole over me; I made a try to get on to my feet, but it was no use; everything seemed to be slipping away. I could just see my wife start towards me, and the old Don pull her back, when my head sank on the table and my senses left me.

"The next thing I remember is finding myself lying precious sick and weak at the bottom of my own boat, with nothing but the big green seas rolling around me. The island had vanished, and with it my wife and child. For an eternity I sailed those cursed seas this way and that, seeking for the land I had lost; but I must have drifted into different waters, for I saw no more islands. My food ran out, and I had given up all hope of being saved, when one of your luggers hove in sight and picked me up.

"Now, gentlemen, you've heard my story. Whether you believe it or not, of course I don't know; but I take my affidavit that all I have told you is true; and, what's more, if you'll fit out a vessel to search for that island and its treasure, I'll take command of her. Should we find it, I reckon I can make you the two richest men on earth; and when I get my wife and child I shall be the happiest. In proof that the treasure's there, and as my contribution towards the expenses, I hand you this." From an inner pocket he produced a leather pouch, from which he took what at first appeared to be a small piece of crystal; on inspection it turned out to be a diamond worth at least a hundred pounds. "That stone," said he, holding it at the angle which would best show its fire, "came from the coffers of the treasure-ship, and is the only one left out of all I saw and took. I will leave it with you for the present. Remember, there's thousands more aboard the old galleon, bigger and better nor that. Say, gentlemen, will you adventure for such merchandise?"

It was too late to go into the question that night, so we bade him come up for a further talk in the morning. Rising, he gravely bowed to us, and, without another word, withdrew. Next day he was not to be found, nor has he ever made his appearance since. Whether he lost himself and fell into the sea, or whether he was an impostor and feared detection, I haven't the remotest idea. I only know that I have a valuable diamond in my possession which I am waiting to restore to its uncommonly curious owner.

This work was published before January 1, 1924, and is in the public domain worldwide because the author died at least 100 years ago.



A MERE INTERLUDE

A Complete Story

By Thomas Hardy

Author of "Far from the Madding Crowd," "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," "Under the Greenwood Tree," "Trumpet Major," "Two on a Tower," etc. etc.

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I.

IT was often said, and oftener surmised that Baptista Trewthen was a young woman with scarcely emotions or character. There was nothing in her to love, and nothing to hate—so ran the general opinion. That she showed few positive qualities was true. The colours and tones which changing events paint on the faces of active womankind were looked for in vain upon hers. But still waters run deep; and no crisis had come in the years of her early maidenhood to demonstrate what lay hidden within her, like metal in a mine.

She was the daughter of a small farmer in St. Maria's, one of the Isles of Lyonesse beyond Off-Wessex, who had spent a large sum, as there understood, on her education, by sending her to the mainland for two years. At nineteen she was entered at the Training College for Teachers, and at twenty-one nominated to a school in the country, near Tor-upon-Sea, whither she proceeded after the Christmas examination and holidays.

The months passed by from winter to spring and summer, and Baptista applied herself to her new duties as best she could, till an uneventful year had elapsed. Then an air of abstraction pervaded her bearing as she walked to and fro, twice a day, and she showed the traits of a person who had something on her mind. A widow, by name Mrs. Wace, in whose house Baptista Trewthen had been provided with a sitting-room and bedroom till the school-house should be built, noticed this change in her youthful tenant's manner, and at last ventured to press her with a few questions.

"It has nothing to do with the place, nor with you," said Miss Trewthen.

"Then it is the salary?"

"No, nor the salary."

"Then it is something you have heard from home, my dear."

Baptista was silent for a few moments. 'It is Mr. Heddegan,' she murmured. 'Him they used to call David Heddegan before he got his money.'

"And who is the Mr. Heddegan they used to call David?"

"An old bachelor at Giant's Town, St. Maria's, with no relations whatever, who lives about a stone's throw from father's. When I was a child he used to take me on his knee and say he'd marry me some day. Now I am a woman the jest has turned earnest, and he is anxious to do it. And father and mother says I can't do better than have him."

"He's well off?"

"Yes—he's the richest man we know—as a friend and neighbour."

"How much older did you say he was than yourself?"

"I didn't say. Twenty years at least."

"And an unpleasant man in the bargain perhaps?"

"No—he's not unpleasant."

"Well, child, all I can say is that I'd resist any such engagement if it's not palatable to 'ee. You are comfortable here, in my little house, I hope. All the parish like ye: and I've never been so cheerful, since my poor husband left me to wear his wings, as I've been with ye as my lodger."

The schoolmistress assured her landlady that she could return the sentiment. "But here comes my perplexity," she said. "I don't like keeping school. Ah, you are surprised—you didn't suspect it. That's because I've concealed my feeling. Well, I simply hate school. I don't care for children—they are unpleasant, troublesome little things, whom nothing would delight so much as to hear that you had fallen down dead. Yet I would even put up with them if it was not for the inspector. For three months before his visit I didn't sleep soundly. And the Committee of Council are always changing the Code, so that you don't know what to teach, and what to leave untaught. I think father and mother are right. They say I shall never excel as a schoolmistress if I dislike the work so, and that therefore I ought to get settled by marrying Mr. Heddegan. Between us two, I like him better than school; but I don't like him quite so much as to wish to marry him."

These conversations, once begun, were continued from day to day; till at length the young girl's elderly friend and landlady threw in her opinion on the side of Miss Trewthen's parents. All things considered, she declared, the uncertainty of the school, the labour, Baptista's natural dislike for teaching, it would be as well to take what fate offered, and make the best of matters by wedding her father's old neighbour and prosperous friend.

The Easter holidays came round, and Baptista went to spend them as usual in her native isle, going by train into Off-Wessex and crossing by packet from Penzance. When she returned in the middle of April her face wore a more settled aspect.

"Well?" said the expectant Mrs. Wace.

"I have agreed to have him as my husband," said Baptista, in an off-hand way. 'Heaven knows if it will be for the best or not. But I have agreed to do it, and so the matter is settled."

Mrs. Wace commended her; but Baptista did not care to dwell on the subject; so that allusion to it was very infrequent between them. Nevertheless, among other things, she repeated to the widow from time to time in monosyllabic remarks that the wedding was really impending; that it was arranged for the summer, and that she had given notice of leaving the school at the August holidays. Later on she announced more specifically that her marriage was to take place immediately after her return home at the beginning of the month aforesaid.

She now corresponded regularly with Mr. Heddegan. Her letters from him were seen, at least on the outside, and in part within, by Mrs. Wace. Had she read more of their interiors than the occasional sentences shown her by Baptista she would have perceived that the scratchy, rusty handwriting of Miss Trewthen's betrothed conveyed little more matter than details of their future housekeeping, and his preparations for the same, with innumerable "my dears" sprinkled in disconnectedly, to show the depth of his affection without the inconveniences of syntax.

II.

It was the end of July—dry, too dry, even for the season—the delicate green herbs and vegetables that grew in this favoured end of the kingdom tasting rather of the watering-pot than of the pure fresh moisture from the skies. Baptista's boxes were packed, and one Saturday morning she departed by a waggonette to the station, and thence by train to Penzance, from which port she was, as usual, to cross the water immediately to her home, and become Mr. Heddegan's wife on the Wednesday of the week following.

She might have returned a week sooner. But though the wedding day had loomed so near, and the banns were out, she delayed her departure till this last moment, saying it was not necessary for her to be at home long beforehand. As Mr. Heddegan was older than herself, she said, she was to be married in her ordinary summer bonnet and grey silk frock, and there were no preparations to make that had not been amply made by her parents and intended husband.

In due time, after a hot and tedious journey, she reached Penzance. She here obtained some refreshment, and then went towards the pier, where she learnt to her surprise that the little steamboat plying between the town and the islands had left at eleven o'clock; the usual hour of departure in the afternoon having been forestalled in consequence of the fogs which had for a few days prevailed towards evening, making twilight navigation dangerous.

This being Saturday, there was now no other boat till Tuesday, and it became obvious that here she would have to remain for the three days, unless her friends should think fit to rig out one of the island' sailing-boats and come to fetch her—a not very likely contingency, the sea distance being nearly forty miles.

Baptista, however, had been detained in Penzance on more than one occasion before, either on account of bad weather or some such reason as the present, and she was therefore not in any personal alarm. But, as she was to be married on the following Wednesday, the delay was certainly inconvenient to a more than ordinary degree, since it would leave less than a day's interval between her arrival and the wedding ceremony.

Apart from this awkwardness she did not much mind the accident. It was indeed curious to see how little she minded. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that, although she was going to do the critical deed of her life quite willingly, she experienced an indefinable relief at the postponement of her meeting with Heddegan. But her manner after making discovery of the hindrance was quiet and subdued, even to passivity itself; as was instanced by her having, at the moment of receiving information that the steamer had sailed, replied "Oh," so coolly to the porter with her luggage, that he was almost disappointed at her lack of disappointment.

The question now was, should she return again to Mrs. Wace, in the Devonshire village, or wait in the town at which she had arrived. She would have preferred to go back, but the distance was too great; moreover, having left the place for good, and somewhat dramatically, to become a bride, a return, even for so short a space, would have been a trifle humiliating.

Leaving, then, her boxes at the station, her next anxiety was to secure a respectable, or rather genteel, lodging in the popular seaside resort confronting her. To this end she looked about the town, in which, though she had passed through it half-a-dozen times, she was practically a stranger.

Baptista found a room to suit her over a fruiterer's shop; where she made herself at home, and set herself in order after her journey. An early cup of tea having revived her spirits she walked out to reconnoitre.

Being a schoolmistress she avoided looking at the schools, and having a sort of trade connection with books, she avoided looking at the booksellers; but wearying of the other shops she inspected the churches; not that for her own part she cared much about ecclesiastical edifices; but tourists looked at them, and so would she—a proceeding for which no one would have credited her with any great originality, such, for instance, as that she subsequently showed herself to possess. The churches soon oppressed her: St. Mary's was neither old nor new, St. Paul's was quite new; and she could find no others.

Yet the town and the walks in this land of strawberries, these headquarters of early English flowers and fruit, were then, as always, attractive. From the more picturesque streets she went to Barbican Street, and the Pier, and the Harbour, and looked at the men at work there, loading and unloading as in the time of the Phœnicians.

"Not Baptista? Yes, Baptista it is!"

The words were uttered behind her. Turning round she gave a start, and became confused, even agitated, for a moment. Then she said in her usual undemonstrative manner, "Oh—is it really you, Charles?"

Without speaking again at once, and with a half-smile, the new-comer glanced her over. There was much criticism, and some resentment—even temper—in his eye.

"I am going home," continued she. "But I have missed the boat."

He scarcely seemed to take in the meaning of this explanation, in the intensity of his critical survey. "Teaching still—What a fine schoolmistress you make, Baptista, I warrant!" he said with a slight flavour of sarcasm, which was not lost upon her.

"I know I am nothing to brag of," she replied. "That's why I have given up."

"Oh—given up? You astonish me."

"I hate the profession."

"Perhaps that's because I am in it."

"Oh no, it isn't. But I am going to enter on another life altogether. I am going to be married next week to Mr. David Heddegan."

The young man—fortified as he was by a natural cynical pride and passionateness—winced at this unexpected reply, notwithstanding.

"Who is Mr. David Heddegan?" he asked, as indifferently as lay in his power.

She informed him the bearer of the name was a general merchant of Giant's Town, St. Mary's—her father's nearest neighbour and oldest friend.

"Then we shan't see anything more of you on the mainland?" inquired the schoolmaster.

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Miss Trewthen.

'Here endeth the career of the belle of the boarding-school your father was foolish enough to send you to. A 'general merchant's' wife in Scilly. Will you sell pounds of soap and pennyworths of tin-tacks, or whole bars of saponaceous matter, and great ten penny nails?'

"He's not in such a small way as that!" she almost pleaded. "He owns ships, though they are rather little ones!"

"Oh, well, it is much the same. Come, let us walk on; it is tedious to stand still. I thought you would be a failure in education," he continued, when she obeyed him and strolled ahead. 'You never showed power that way. You remind me much of some of those women who think they are sure to be great actresses if they go on the stage, because they have a pretty face, and forget that what we require is acting. But you found your mistake, didn't you?'

"Don't taunt me, Charles." It was noticeable that the young schoolmaster's tone caused her no anger or retaliatory passion; far otherwise: there was a tear in her eye. "How is it you are at Penzance?" she inquired.

"I don't taunt you. I speak the truth, purely in a friendly way, as I should to any one I wished well. Though for that matter I might have some excuse even for taunting you. Such a terrible hurry as you've been in. I hate a woman who is in such a hurry."

"How do you mean that?"

"Why—to be somebody's wife or other—anything's wife rather than nobody's. You couldn't wait for me, oh, no. Well, thank God, I'm cured of all that!"

"How merciless you are!" she said bitterly. "Wait for you? What does that mean, Charley? You never showed—anything to wait for—anything special towards me."

"O come, Baptista; come!"

"What I mean is, nothing definite," she expostulated. "I suppose you liked me a little; but it seemed to me to be only a pastime on your part, and that you never meant to make an honourable engagement of it."

"There, that's just it! You girls expect a man to mean business at the first look. No man when he first becomes interested in a woman has any definite scheme of engagement to marry her in his mind, unless he is meaning a vulgar mercenary marriage. However, I did at last mean an honourable engagement, as you call it, come to that."

"But you never said so, and an indefinite courtship soon injures a woman's position and credit, sooner than you think."

"Baptista, I solemnly declare that in six months I should have asked you to marry me."

She walked along in silence, looking on the ground, and appearing very uncomfortable. Presently he said, "Would you have waited for me if you had known?"

To this she whispered in a sorrowful whisper, "Yes!"

They went still farther in silence—passing along one of the beautiful walks on the outskirts of the town, yet not observant of scene or situation. Her shoulder and his were close together, and he clasped his fingers round the small of her arm—quite lightly, and without any attempt at impetus; yet the act seemed to say, "Now I hold you, and my will must be yours."

Recurring to a previous question of hers he said, "I have merely run down here for a day or two from school near Truro, before going off to the north for the rest of my holiday. I have seen my relations at Redruth quite lately, so I am not going there this time. How little I thought of meeting you! How very different the circumstances would have been if, instead of parting again as we must in half-an-hour or so, possibly for ever, you had been now just going off with me, as my wife, on our honeymoon trip. Ha—ha—well—so humorous is life!"

She stopped suddenly. "I must go back now—this is altogether too painful, Charley! It is not at all a kind mood you are in today."

"I don't want to pain you—you know I do not," he said more gently. "Only it just exasperates me—this you are going to do. I wish you would not."

"What?"

"Marry him. There, now I have showed you my true sentiments."

"I must do it now," said she.

"Why?" he asked, dropping the off-hand masterful tone he had hitherto spoken in, and becoming

earnest; still holding her arm, however, as if she were his chattel to be taken up or put down at will. "It is never too late to break off a marriage that's distasteful to you. Now I'll say one thing; and it is truth: I wish you would marry me instead of him, even now, at the last moment, though you have served me so badly."

"Oh, it is not possible to think of that!" she answered hastily, shaking her head. "When I get home all will be prepared—it is ready even now—the things for the party, the furniture, Mr. Heddegan's new suit, and everything. I should require the courage of a tropical lion to go home there and say I wouldn't carry out my promise!"

"Then go, in Heaven's name! But there would be no necessity for you to go home and face them in that way. If we were to marry, it would have to be at once, instantly; or not at all. I should think your affection not worth the having unless you agreed to come back with me to Truro this evening, where we could be married by licence on Monday morning. And then no Mr. David Heddegan or anybody else could get you away from me."

"I must go home by the Tuesday boat," she faltered. "What would they think if I did not come?"

"You could go home by that boat just the same. All the difference would be that I should go with you. You could leave me on the quay, where I'd have a smoke, while you went and saw your father and mother privately; you could then tell them what you had done, and that I was waiting not far off; that I was a schoolmaster in a fairly good position, and a young man you had known when you were at the Training College. Then I would come boldly forward; and they would see that it could not be altered, and so you wouldn't suffer a lifelong misery by being the wife of a wretched old gaffer you don't like at all. Now, honestly; you do like me best, don't you, Baptista?"

"Yes."

"Then we will do as I say."

She did not pronounce a clear affirmative. But that she consented to the novel proposition at some moment or other of that walk was apparent by what occurred a little later.

III.

An enterprise of such pith required, indeed, less talking than consideration. The first thing they did in carrying it out was to return to the railway station, where Baptista took from her luggage a small trunk of immediate necessities which she would in any case have required after missing the boat. That same afternoon they travelled up the line to Truro.

Charles Stow (as his name was), despite his disdainful indifference to things, was very careful of appearances, and made the journey independently of her though in the same train. He told her where she could get board and lodgings in the city; and with merely a distant nod to her of a provisional kind, went off to his own quarters, and to see about the license.

On Sunday she saw him in the morning across the nave of the pro-cathedral. In the afternoon they walked together in the fields, where he told her that the licence would be ready next day, and would be available the day after, when the ceremony could be performed as early after eight o'clock as they should choose.

His courtship, thus renewed after an interval of two years, was as impetuous, violent even, as it was short. The next day came and passed, and the final arrangements were made. Their agreement was to get the ceremony over as soon as they possibly could the next morning, so as to go on to Penzance at once, and reach that place in time for the boat's departure the same day. It was in obedience to Baptista's earnest request that Stow consented thus to make the whole journey to Scilly by land and water at one heat, and not break it at Penzance; she seemed to be oppressed with a dread of lingering anywhere, this great first act of disobedience to her parents once accomplished, with the weight on her mind that her home had to be convulsed by the disclosure of it. To face her difficulties over the water immediately she had created them was, however, a course more desired by Baptista than by her lover; though for once he gave way.

The next morning was bright and warm as those which had preceded it. By six o'clock it seemed nearly noon, as is often the case in that part of England in the summer season. By nine they were husband and wife. They packed up and departed by the earliest train after the service; and on the way discussed at length what she should say on meeting her parents, Charley dictating the turn of each phrase. In her anxiety they had travelled so early that when they reached Penzance they found there were nearly two hours on their hands before the steamer's time of sailing.

Baptista was extremely reluctant to be seen promenading the streets of the watering-place with her husband till, as above stated, the household at Giant's Town should know the unexpected course of events from her own lips; and it was just possible, if not likely, that some Scillonian might be prowling about there, or even have come across the sea to look for her. To meet any one to whom she was known, and to have to reply to awkward questions about the strange young man at her side before her well-framed announcement had been delivered at proper time and place, was a thing she could not contemplate with equanimity. So, instead of looking at the shops and harbour, they went along the coast a little way.

The heat of the morning was by this time intense. They clambered up on some cliffs, and while sitting there, looking around at St. Michael's Mount and other objects, Charles said to her that he thought he would run down to the beach at their feet, and take just one plunge into the sea.

Baptista did not much like the idea of being left alone; it was gloomy, she said; but he assured her he would not be gone more than a quarter of an hour at the outside, and she passively assented.

Down he went, disappeared, appeared again, and looked back. Then he again proceeded, and vanished, till, as a small waxen object, she saw him emerge from the nook that had screened him, cross the white fringe of foam, and walk into the undulating mass of blue. Once in the water he seemed less inclined to hurry than before; he remained a long time; and, unable either to appreciate his skill or criticize his want of it at that distance, she withdrew her eyes from the spot, and gazed at the still outline of St. Michael's—now beautifully toned in grey.

Her anxiety for the hour of departure, and to cope at once with the approaching incidents that she would have to manipulate as best she could, sent her into a reverie. It was now Tuesday; she would reach home in the evening—a very late time they would say; but, as the delay was a pure accident, they would deem her marriage to Mr. Heddegan to-morrow still practicable. Then Charles would have to be produced from the background. It was a terrible undertaking to think of, and she almost regretted her temerity in wedding so hastily that morning. The rage of her father would be so crushing; the reproaches of her mother so bitter; and perhaps Charles would answer hotly, and perhaps cause

estrangement till death. There had obviously been no alarm about her at St. Mary's, or somebody would have sailed across to inquire for her. She had, in a letter written at the beginning of the week, spoken of the hour at which she intended to leave her country schoolhouse; and from this her friends had probably perceived that by such timing she would run a risk of losing the Saturday boat. She had missed it, and as a consequence sat here on the shore as Mrs. Charles Stow.

This brought her to the present, and she turned from the outline of St. Michael's Mount to look about for her husband's form. He was, as far as she could discover, no longer in the sea. Then he was dressing. By moving a few steps she could see where his clothes lay. But Charles was not beside them.

Baptista looked back again at the water in bewilderment, as if her senses were the victim of some sleight of hand. Not a speck or spot resembling a man's head or face showed anywhere. By this time she was alarmed, and her alarm intensified when she perceived a little beyond the scene of her husband's bathing a small area of water, the quality of whose surface differed from that of the surrounding expanse as the coarse vegetation of some foul patch in a mead differs from the fine green of the remainder. Elsewhere it looked flexuous, here it looked vermiculated and lumpy, and her marine experiences suggested to her in a moment that two currents met and caused a turmoil at this place.

She descended as hastily as her trembling limbs would allow. The way down was terribly long, and before reaching the heap of clothes it occurred to her that, after all, it would be best to run first for help. Hastening along in a lateral direction she proceeded inland till she met a man, and soon afterwards two others. To them she exclaimed, "I think a gentleman who was bathing is in some danger. I cannot see him as I could. Will you please run and help him, at once, if you will be so kind?"

She did not think of turning to show them the exact spot, indicating it vaguely by the direction of her hand, and still going on her way with the idea of gaining more assistance. When she deemed, in her faintness, that she had carried the alarm far enough, she faced about and dragged herself back again. Before reaching the now dreaded spot she met one of the men.

"We can see nothing at all, Miss," he declared.

Having gained the beach, she found the tide in, and no sign of Charley's clothes. The other men whom she had besought to come had disappeared, it must have been in some other direction, for she had not met them going away. They, finding nothing, had probably thought her alarm a mere conjecture, and given up the quest.

Baptista sank down upon the stones near at hand. Where Charley had undressed was now sea. There could not be the least doubt that he was drowned, and his body sucked under by the current; while his clothes, lying within high-water mark, had probably been carried away by the rising tide.

She remained in a stupor for some minutes, till a strange sensation succeeded the aforesaid perceptions, mystifying her intelligence, and leaving her physically almost inert. With his personal disappearance, the last three days of her life with him seemed to be swallowed up, also his image, in her mind's eye, waned curiously, receded far away, grew stranger and stranger, less and less real. Their meeting and marriage had been so sudden, unpremeditated, adventurous, that she could hardly believe that she had played her part in such a reckless drama. Of all the few hours of her life with Charles, the portion that most insisted in coming back to memory was their fortuitous encounter on the previous Saturday, and those bitter reprimands with which he had begun the attack, as it might be called, which had piqued her to an unexpected consummation.

A sort of cruelty, an imperiousness, even in his warmth, had characterized Charles Stow. As a lover he had ever been a bit of a tyrant; and it might pretty truly have been said that he had stung her into marriage with him at last. Still more alien from her life did these reflections operate to make him; and then they would be chased away by an interval of passionate weeping and mad regret. Finally, there returned upon the confused mind of the young wife the recollection that she was on her way homeward, and that the packet would sail in three-quarters of an hour.

Except the parasol in her hand, all she possessed was at the station awaiting her onward journey.

She looked in that direction; and, entering one of those undemonstrative phases so common with her, walked quietly on.

At first she made straight for the railway; but suddenly turning she went to a shop and wrote an anonymous line announcing his death by drowning to the only person she had ever heard Charles mention as a relative. Posting this stealthily, and with a fearful look around her, she seemed to acquire a terror of the late events, pursuing her way to the station as if followed by a spectre.

When she got to the office she asked for the luggage that she had left there on the Saturday as well as the trunk left on the morning just lapsed. All were put in the boat, and she herself followed. Quickly as these things had been done, the whole proceeding, nevertheless, had been almost automatic on Baptista's part, ere she had come to any definite conclusion on her course.

Just before the bell rang she heard a conversation on the pier, which removed the last shade of doubt from her mind, if any had existed, that she was Charles Stow's widow. The sentences were but fragmentary, but she could easily piece them out.

"A man drowned—swam out too far—was a stranger to the place—people in boat—saw him go down—couldn't get there in time."

The news was little more definite than this as yet; though it may as well be stated once for all that the statement was true. Charley, with the over-confidence of his nature, had ventured out too far for his strength, and succumbed in the absence of assistance, his lifeless body being at that moment suspended in the transparent mid-depths of the bay. His clothes, however, had merely been gently lifted by the rising tide, and floated into a nook hard by, where they lay out of sight of the passers-by till a day or two after.

IV.

In ten minutes they were steaming out of the harbour for their voyage of four or five hours, at whose ending she would have to tell her strange story.

As Penzance and all its environing scenes disappeared behind Mousehole and St. Clement's Isle, Baptista's ephemeral, meteor-like husband impressed her yet more as a fantasy. She was still in such a trance-like state that she had been an hour on the little packet-boat before she became aware of the agitating fact that Mr. Heddegan was on board with her.

"Hee-hee! Well, the truth is, I wouldn't interrupt ye. 'I reckon she don't see me, or won't see me,' I said, 'and what's the hurry? She'll see enough o' me soon!' I hope ye be well, mee deer?"

He was a hale, well-conditioned man of about five-and-forty, of the complexion common to those whose lives are passed on the bluffs and beaches of an ocean isle. He extended the four quarters of his face in a genial smile, and his hand for a grasp of the same magnitude. She gave her own in surprised docility, and he continued:

"I couldn't help coming across to meet ye. What an unfortunate thing you missing the boat and not coming Saturday! They meant to have warned ye that the time was changed, but forgot it at the last moment. The truth is that I should have informed ye myself; but I was that busy finishing up a job last week, so as to have this week free, that I trusted to your father for attending to these little things. However, so plain and quiet as it is all to be, it really do not matter so much as it might otherwise have done, and I hope ye haven't been greatly put out. Now, if you'd sooner that I should not be seen talking to ye—if ye feel shy at all before strangers—just say. I'll leave ye to yourself till we get home."

"Thank you much. I am indeed a little tired, Mr. Heddegan."

He nodded urbane acquiescence, strolled away immediately, and minutely inspected the surface of the funnel, till some female passengers of Giant's Town tittered at what they must have thought a rebuff—for the approaching wedding was known to many on St. Maria's Island, though to nobody elsewhere. Baptista coloured at their satire, and called him back, and forced herself to commune with him in at least a mechanically friendly manner.

The opening event had been thus different from her expectation, and she had adumbrated no act to meet it. Taken aback she passively allowed circumstances to pilot her along; and so the voyage was made.

It was near dusk when they touched the pier of Hugh's Town, where several friends and neighbours stood awaiting them. Her father had a lantern in his hand. Her mother, too, was there, reproachfully glad that the delay had at last ended so simply. Mrs. Trewthen and her daughter went together along the Hugh, or promenade, to the house, rather in advance of her husband and Mr. Heddegan, who talked in loud tones which reached the women over their shoulders.

Some would have called Mrs. Trewthen a good mother; but though well meaning she was maladroit, and her intentions missed their mark. This might have been partly attributable to the slight deafness from which she suffered. Now, as usual, the chief utterances came from her lips.

"Ah, yes, I'm so glad, my child, that you've got over safe. It is all ready, and everything so well arranged, that nothing but misfortune could hinder you settling as, with God's grace, becomes ye. Close to your mother's door a'most, 'twill be a great blessing, I'm sure; and I was very glad to find from your letters that you'd held your word sacred. That's right—make your word your bond always. Mrs. Wace seems to be a sensible woman. I hope the Lord will do for her as he's doing for you no long time hence. And how did ye get over the terrible journey from Exeter to Penzance? Once you'd done with the railway, of course, you seemed quite at home. Well, Baptista, conduct yourself seemly, and all will be well."

Thus admonished, Baptista entered the house, her father and Mr. Heddegan immediately at her back. Her mother had been so didactic that she had felt herself absolutely unable to broach the subjects in the centre of her mind.

The familiar room, with the dark ceiling, the well-spread table, the old chairs, had never before spoken

so eloquently of the times ere she knew or had heard of Charley Stow. She went upstairs to take off her things, her mother remaining below to complete the disposition of the supper, and attend to the preparation of tomorrow's meal, altogether composing such an array of pies, from pies of fish to pies of turnips, as was never heard of outside the Western Duchy. Baptista, once alone, sat down and did nothing; and was called before she had taken off her bonnet.

"I'm coming," she cried, jumping up, and speedily disapparelling herself, brushed her hair with a few touches and went down.

Two or three of Mr. Heddegan's and her father's friends had dropped in, and expressed their sympathy for the delay she had been subjected to. The meal was a most merry one except to Baptista. She had desired privacy, and there was none; and to break the news was already a greater difficulty than it had been at first. Everything around her, animate and inanimate, great and small, insisted that she had come home to be married; and she could not get a chance to say nay.

One or two people sang songs, as overtures to the melody of the morrow, till at length bedtime came, and they all withdrew, her mother having retired a little earlier. When Baptista found herself again alone in her bedroom the case stood as before: she had come home with much to say, and she had said nothing.

It was now growing clear even to herself that Charles being dead, she had not determination sufficient within her to break tidings which, had he been alive, would have imperatively announced themselves. And thus with the stroke of midnight came the turning of the scale; her story should remain untold. It was not that upon the whole she thought it best not to attempt to tell it; but that she could not undertake so explosive a matter. To stop the wedding now would cause a convulsion in Hugh's Town little short of volcanic. Weakened, tired, and terrified as she had been by the day's adventures, she could not make herself the author of such a catastrophe. But how refuse Heddegan without telling? It really seemed to her as if her marriage with Mr. Heddegan were about to take place as if nothing had intervened.

Morning came. The events of the previous days were cut off from her present existence by scene and sentiment more completely than ever. Charles Stow had grown to be a special being of whom, owing to his character, she entertained rather fearful than loving memory. Baptista could hear when she awoke that her parents were already moving about downstairs. But she did not rise till her mother's rather rough voice resounded up the staircase as it had done on the preceding evening.

"Baptista! Come, time to be stirring! The man will be here, by heaven's blessing, in three-quarters of an hour. He has looked in already for a minute or two—and says he's going to the church to see if things be well forward."

Baptista arose, looked out of the window, and took the easy course. When she emerged from the regions above she was arrayed in her new silk frock and best stockings, wearing a linen jacket over the former for breakfasting, and her common slippers over the latter, not to spoil the new ones on the rough precincts of the dwelling.

It is unnecessary to dwell at any great length on this part of the morning's proceedings. She revealed nothing; and married Heddegan, as she had given her word to do, on that appointed August day.

Mr. Heddegan forgave the coldness of his bride's manner during and after the wedding ceremony, full well aware that there had been considerable reluctance on her part to acquiesce in this neighbourly arrangement, and, as a philosopher of long standing, holding that whatever Baptista's attitude now, the conditions would probably be much the same six months hence as those which ruled among other married couples.

An absolutely unexpected shock was given to Baptista's listless mind about an hour after the wedding service. They had nearly finished the mid-day dinner when the now husband said to her father, "We think of starting about two. And the breeze being so fair we shall bring up inside Penzance new pier about six at least."

"What—are we going to Penzance?" said Baptista. "I don't know anything of it."

"Didn't you tell her?" asked her father of Heddegan.

It transpired that, owing to the delay in her arrival, this proposal too, among other things, had in the hurry not been mentioned to her, except some time ago as a general suggestion that they would go somewhere. Heddegan had imagined that any trip would be pleasant, and one to the mainland the pleasantest of all.

She looked so distressed at the announcement that her husband willingly offered to give it up, though he had not had a holiday off the island for a whole year. Then she pondered on the inconvenience of staying at Hugh's Town, where all the inhabitants were bonded, by the circumstances of their situation, into a sort of family party, which permitted and encouraged on such occasions as these oral criticism that was apt to disturb the equanimity of newly married girls, and would especially worry Baptista in her strange situation. Hence, unexpectedly, she agreed not to disorganize her husband's plans for the wedding jaunt, and it was settled that, as originally intended, they should proceed in a neighbour's sailing boat to the metropolis of the district.

In this way they arrived at Penzance without difficulty or mishap. Bidding adieu to Jenkin and his man, who had sailed them over, they strolled arm in arm off the pier, Baptista silent, cold, and obedient. Heddegan had arranged to take her as far as Plymouth before their return, but to go no further than where they had landed that day. Their first business was to find an inn; and in this they had unexpected difficulty, since for some reason or other—possibly the fine weather—many of the nearest at hand were full of tourists and commercial travellers. He led her on till he reached a tavern which, though comparatively unpretending, stood in as attractive a spot as any in the town; and this, somewhat to their surprise after their previous experience, they found apparently empty. The considerate old man, thinking that Baptista was educated to artistic notions, though he himself was deficient in them, had decided that it was most desirable to have, on such an occasion as the present, an apartment with "a good view" (the expression being one he had often heard in use among tourists); and he therefore asked for a favourite room on the first floor, from which a bow window protruded, for the express purpose of affording such an outlook.

The landlady, after some hesitation, said she was sorry that particular apartment was engaged; the next one, however, or any other in the house, was unoccupied.

"The gentleman who has the best one will give it up tomorrow, and then you can change into it," she added, as Mr. Heddegan hesitated about taking the adjoining and less commanding one.

"We shall be gone tomorrow, and shan't want it," he said.

Wishing not to lose customers, the landlady earnestly continued that since he was bent on having the best room, perhaps the other gentleman would not object to move at once into the one they despised, since, though nothing could be seen from the window, the room was equally large.

"Well, if he doesn't care for a view," said Mr. Heddegan, with the air of a highly artistic man who did.

"Oh, no—I am sure he doesn't," she said. "I can promise that you shall have the room you want. If you would not object to go for a walk for half an hour, I could have it ready, and your things in it, and a nice tea laid in the bow-window by the time you come back?"

This proposal was deemed satisfactory by the fussy old tradesman, and they went out. Baptista nervously conducted him in an opposite direction to her walk of the former day in other company, showing on her wan face, had he observed it, how much she was beginning to regret her sacrificial step for mending matters that morning.

She took advantage of a moment when her husband's back was turned to inquire casually in a shop if anything had been heard of the gentleman who was sucked down in the eddy while bathing.

The shopman said, "Yes, his body has been washed ashore," and had just handed Baptista a newspaper on which she discerned the heading, "A schoolmaster drowned while bathing," when her husband turned to join her. She might have pursued the subject without raising suspicion; but it was more than flesh and blood could do, and completing a small purchase almost ran out of the shop.

"What is your terrible hurry, mee deer?" said Heddegan, hastening after.

"I don't know—I don't want to stay in shops," she gasped.

"And we won't," he said. "They are suffocating this weather. Let's go back and have some tay!"

They found the much desired apartment awaiting their entry. It was a sort of combination bed and sitting room, and the table was prettily spread with high tea in the bow-window, a bunch of flowers in the midst, and a best parlour chair on each side. Here they shared the meal by the ruddy light of the vanishing sun. But though the view had been engaged, regardless of expense, exclusively for Baptista's pleasure, she did not direct any keen attention out of the window. Her gaze as often fell on the floor and walls of the room as elsewhere, and on the table as much as on either, beholding nothing at all.

But there was a change. Opposite her seat was the door, upon which her eyes presently became riveted like those of a little bird upon a snake. For, on a peg at the back of the door, there hung a hat; such a hat—surely, from its peculiar make, the actual hat—that had been worn by Charles. Conviction grew to certainty when she saw a railway ticket sticking up from the band. Charles had put the ticket there—she had noticed the act.

Her teeth almost chattered; she murmured something incoherent. Her husband jumped up and said, "You are not well! What is it? What shall I get ye?"

"Smelling salts!" she said, quickly and desperately; "at that chemist's shop you were in just now."

He jumped up like the anxious old man that he was, caught up his own hat from a back table, and without observing the other hastened out and downstairs.

Left alone she gazed and gazed at the back of the door, then spasmodically rang the bell. An honest-looking country maid-servant appeared in response.

"A hat!" murmured Baptista, pointing with her finger. "It does not belong to us."

"Oh, yes, I'll take it away," said the young woman with some hurry. "It belongs to the other gentleman."

She spoke with a certain awkward facetiousness, and took the hat out of the room. Baptista had recovered her outward composure. "The other gentleman?" she said. "Where is the other gentleman?"

"He's in the next room, ma'am. He removed out of this to oblige ye."

"How can you say so? I should hear him if he were there," said Baptista, sufficiently recovered to argue down an apparent untruth.

"He's there," said the girl, hardily.

"Then it is strange that he makes no noise," said Mrs. Heddegan, convicting the girl of falsity by a look.

"He makes no noise; but it is not strange," said the servant.

All at once a dread took possession of the bride's heart, like a cold hand laid thereon; for it flashed upon her that there was a possibility of reconciling the girl's statement with her own knowledge of facts.

"Why does he make no noise?" she weakly said.

The waiting-maid was silent, and looked at her questioner. "If I tell you, ma'am, you won't tell missis?" she whispered.

Baptista promised.

"Because he's a-lying dead!" said the girl. "He's the schoolmaster that was drowned yesterday."

"Oh!" said the bride, covering her eyes. "Then he was in this room till just now?"

"Yes," said the maid, thinking the young lady's agitation natural enough. "And I told missis that I thought she oughtn't to have done it, because I don't hold it right to keep visitors so much in the dark where death's concerned; but she said the gentleman didn't die of anything infectious; she was a poor, honest, innkeeper's wife, she says, who had to get her living by making hay while the sun sheened. And owing to the drowned gentleman being brought here, she said, it kept so many people away that we were empty, though all the other houses were full. So when your good man set his mind upon the room, and she would have lost good paying folk if he'd not had it, it wasn't to be supposed, she said, that she'd let anything stand in the way. Ye won't say that I've told ye, please, m'm? All the linen has been changed, and as the inquest won't be till tomorrow, after you are gone, she thought you wouldn't know a word of it, being strangers here."

The returning footsteps of her husband broke off further narration. Baptista waved her hand, for she could not speak. The waiting-maid quickly withdrew, and Mr. Heddegan entered with the smelling salts and other nostrums.

"Any better?" he questioned.

"I don't like the hotel," she exclaimed, almost simultaneously. "I can't bear it—it doesn't suit me!"

"Is that all that's the matter?" he returned pettishly (this being the first time of his showing such a mood). "Upon my heart and life such trifling is trying to any man's temper, Baptista! Sending me about from here to yond, and then when I come back saying ye don't like the place that I have sunk so much money and words to get for 'ee. Od dang it all, 'tis enough to—— But I won't say any more at present, mee deer, though it is just too much to expect to turn out o' the house now. We shan't get another quiet place at this time of the evening—every other inn in the town is bustling with rackety folk of one sort and 'tother, while here 'tis as quiet as the grave—the country, I would say. So bide still, d'ye hear, and tomorrow we shall be out of the town altogether—as early as you like."

The obstinacy of age had, in short, overmastered its complaisance, and the young woman said no more. The simple course of telling him that in the adjoining room lay a corpse which had lately occupied their own night, it would have seemed, have been an effectual one without further disclosure, but to allude to that subject, however it was disguised, was more than Heddegan's young wife had strength for. Horror broke her down. In the unexpected contingency one thing only presented itself to her paralysed regard—that here she was doomed to abide, in a hideous contiguity to the dead husband and the living.

VI.

Kindly time had withdrawn the foregoing event three days from the present of Baptista Heddegan. It was ten o'clock in the morning; she had been ill, not in an ordinary or definite sense, but in a state of cold stupefaction, from which it was difficult to arouse her so much as to say a few sentences. When questioned she had replied that she was pretty well.

Their trip, as such, had been something of a failure. They had gone on as far as Falmouth, but here he had given way to her entreaties to return home. This they could not very well do without re-passing through Penzance, at which place they had now again arrived.

In the train she had seen a weekly local paper, and read there a paragraph detailing the inquest on Charles. It was added that the funeral was to take place at his native town of Redruth on Friday.

After reading this she had shown no reluctance to enter the fatal neighbourhood of the tragedy, only stipulating that they should take their rest at a different lodging from the first; and now comparatively braced up and calm—indeed a cooler creature altogether than when last in the town, she said to David that she wanted to walk out for a while, as they had plenty of time on their hands.

"To a shop as usual, I suppose, mee deer?"

"Partly for shopping," she said. "And it will be best for you, dear, to stay in after trotting about so much, and have a good rest while I am gone."

He assented; and Baptista sallied forth. As she had stated, her first visit was made to a shop, a draper's.

Without the exercise of much choice she purchased a black bonnet and veil, also a black stuff gown; a black mantle she already wore. These articles were made up into a parcel which, in spite of the saleswoman's offers, her customer said she would take with her. Bearing it on her arm she turned to the railway, and at the station got a ticket for Redruth.

Thus it appeared that, on her recovery from the paralysed mood of the former day, while she had resolved not to blast utterly the happiness of her present husband by revealing the history of the departed one, she had also determined to indulge a certain odd, inconsequent, feminine sentiment of decency, to the small extent to which it could do no harm to any person. At Redruth she emerged from the railway carriage in the black attire purchased at the shop, having during the transit made the change in the empty compartment she had chosen. The other clothes were now in the bandbox and parcel. Leaving these at the cloak-room she proceeded onward, and after a wary survey reached the side of a hill whence a view of the burial ground could be obtained.

It was now a little before two o'clock. While Baptista waited a funeral procession ascended the road. Baptista hastened across, and by the time the procession entered the cemetery gates she had unobtrusively joined it.

In addition to the schoolmaster's own relatives (not a few), the paragraph in the newspapers of his death by drowning had drawn together many neighbours, acquaintances, and onlookers. Among them she passed unnoticed, and with a quiet step pursued the winding path to the chapel, and afterwards thence to the grave. When all was over, and the relatives and idlers had withdrawn, she stepped to the edge of the chasm. From beneath her mantle she drew a little bunch of forget-me-nots, and dropped them in upon the coffin. In a few minutes she also turned and went away from the cemetery. By five o'clock she was again in Penzance.

"You have been a mortal long time!" said her husband, crossly. "I allowed you an hour at most, mee deer."

"It occupied me longer," said she.

"Well—I reckon it is wasting words to complain. Hang it, ye look so tired and wisht that I can't find heart to say what I would!"

"I am—weary and wisht, David; I am. We can get home tomorrow for certain, I hope?"

"We can. And please God we will!" said Mr. Heddegan heartily, as if he too were weary of his brief honeymoon. "I must be into business again on Monday morning at latest."

They left by the next morning steamer, and in the afternoon took up their residence in their own house at Hugh Town.

The hour that she reached the island it was as if a material weight had been removed from Baptista's shoulders. Her husband attributed the change to the influence of the local breezes after the hot-house atmosphere of the mainland. However that might be, settled here, a few doors from her mother's dwelling, she recovered in no very long time much of her customary bearing, which was never very demonstrative. She accepted her position calmly, and faintly smiled when her neighbours learned to call her Mrs. Heddegan, and said she seemed likely to become the leader of fashion in Hugh Town.

Her husband was a man who had made considerably more money by trade than her father had done: and perhaps the greater profusion of surroundings at her command than she had heretofore been mistress of, was not without an effect upon her. One week, two weeks, three weeks passed; and, being pre-eminently a young woman who allowed things to drift, she did nothing whatever either to disclose or conceal traces of her first marriage; or to learn if there existed possibilities—which there undoubtedly did—by which that hasty contract might become revealed to those about her at any unexpected moment.

While yet within the first month of her marriage, and on an evening just before sunset, Baptista was standing within her garden adjoining the house, when she saw passing along the road a personage clad in a greasy black coat and battered tall hat, which, common enough in the slums of a city, had an odd appearance in St. Mary's. The tramp, as he seemed to be, marked her at once—bonnetless and unwrapped as she was her features were plainly recognizable—and with an air of friendly surprise came and leant over the wall.

"What! don't you know me?" said he.

She had some dim recollection of his face, but said that she was not acquainted with him.

"Why, your witness to be sure, ma'am. Don't you mind the man that was mending the church-window when you and your intended husband walked up to be made one; and the clerk called me down from the ladder, and I came and did my part by writing my name and occupation?"

Baptista glanced quickly around; her husband was out of earshot. That would have been of less importance but for the fact that the wedding witnessed by this personage had not been the wedding with Mr. Heddegan, but the one on the day previous.

"I've had a misfortune since then, that's pulled me under," continued her friend. "But don't let me damp yer wedded joy by naming the particulars. Yes, I've seen changes since; though 'tis but a short time ago—let me see, only a month next week, I think; for 'twere the first or second day in August."

"Yes—that's when it was," said another man, a sailor, who had come up with a pipe in his mouth, and felt it necessary to join in (Baptista having receded to escape further speech). "For that was the first time I set foot in Hugh Town; and her husband took her to him the same day."

A dialogue then proceeded between the two men outside the wall, which Baptista could not help hearing.

"Ay, I signed the book that made her one flesh," repeated the decayed glazier. "Where's her good man?"

"About the premises somewhere; but you don't see 'em together much," replied the sailor in an undertone. "You see, he's older than she."

"Older? I should never have thought it from my own observation," said the glazier. "He was a remarkably handsome man."

"Handsome? Well, there he is—we can see for ourselves."

David Heddegan had, indeed, just shown himself at the upper end of the garden; and the glazier,

looking in bewilderment from the husband to the wife, saw the latter turn pale.

Now that decayed glazier was a far-seeing and cunning man—too far-seeing and cunning to allow himself to thrive by simple and straightforward means—and he held his peace, till he could read more plainly the meaning of this riddle, merely adding carelessly, "Well—marriage do alter a man, 'tis true. I should never ha' knowed him!"

He then stared oddly at the disconcerted Baptista, and moving on to where he could again address her, asked her to do him a good turn, since he once had done the same for her. Understanding that he meant money, she handed him some, at which he thanked her, and instantly went away.

VII.

She had escaped exposure on this occasion; but the incident had been an awkward one, and should have suggested to Baptista that sooner or later the secret must leak out. As it was, she suspected that at any rate she had not heard the last of the glazier.

In a day or two, when her husband had gone to the old town on the other side of the island, there came a gentle tap at the door, and the worthy witness of her first marriage made his appearance a second time.

"It took me hours to get to the bottom of the mystery—hours!" he said with a gaze of deep confederacy which offended her pride very deeply. "But thanks to a good intellect I've done it. Now, ma'am, I'm not a man to tell tales, even when a tale would be so good as this. But I'm going back to the mainland again, and a little assistance would be as rain on thirsty ground."

"I helped you two days ago," began Baptista.

"Yes—but what was that, my good lady? Not enough to pay my passage to Penzance. I came over on your account, for I thought there was a mystery somewhere. Now I must go back on my own. Mind this—'twould be very awkward for you if your old man were to know. He's a queer temper, though he may be fond."

She knew as well as her visitor how awkward it would be; and the hush-money she paid was heavy that day. She had, however, the satisfaction of watching the man to the steamer, and seeing him diminish out of sight. But Baptista perceived that the system into which she had been led of purchasing silence thus was one fatal to her peace of mind, particularly if it had to be continued.

Hearing no more from the glazier she hoped the difficulty was past. But another week only had gone by, when, as she was pacing the Giant's Walk (the name given to the promenade), she met the same personage in the company of a fat woman carrying a bundle.

"This is the lady, my dear," he said to his companion. "This, ma'am, is my wife. We've come to settle in the town for a time, if so be we can find room."

"That you won't do," said she. "Nobody can live here who is not privileged."

"I am privileged," said the glazier, "by my trade."

Baptista went on, but in the afternoon she received a visit from the man's wife. This honest woman began to depict, in forcible colours, the necessity for keeping up the concealment.

"I will intercede with my husband, ma'am," she said. "He's a true man if rightly managed; and I'll beg him to consider your position. 'Tis a very nice house you've got here," she added, glancing round, 'and well worth a little sacrifice to keep it."

The unlucky Baptista staved off the danger on this third occasion as she had done on the previous two. But she formed a resolve that, if the attack were once more to be repeated she would face a revelation—worse though that must now be than before she had attempted to purchase silence by bribes. Her tormentors, never believing her capable of acting upon such an intention, came again; but she shut the door in their faces. They retreated, muttering something; but she went to the back of the house, where David Heddegan was.

She looked at him, unconscious of all. The case was serious; she knew that well; and all the more serious in that she liked him better now than she had done at first. Yet, as she herself began to see, the secret was one that was sure to disclose itself. Her name and Charles's stood indelibly written in the registers; and though a month only had passed as yet it was a wonder that his clandestine union with her had not already been discovered by his friends. Thus spurring herself to the inevitable, she spoke to Heddegan.

"David, come indoors. I have something to tell you."

He hardly regarded her at first. She had discerned that during the last week or two he had seemed pre-occupied, as if some private business harassed him. She repeated her request. He replied with a sigh, "Yes, certainly, mee deer."

When they had reached the sitting-room and shut the door she repeated, faintly, "David, I have something to tell you. I have something to confess. You will hate me for having so far deceived you; but perhaps my telling you voluntarily will make you think a little better of me than you would do otherwise."

"Confession?" he said, awakening to interest. "Much confession you can have to make, mee deer, that have been in the world so short a time!"

She saw that he suspected nothing, and it made her task the harder. But on she went steadily. "It is about something that happened before we were married," she said.

"Indeed!"

"Not a very long time before—a short time. And it is about a lover," she faltered.

"I don't much mind that," he said mildly. "In truth, I was in hopes 'twas more."

"In hopes!"

"Well, yes."

This screwed her up to the necessary effort. "I met my old sweetheart. He scorned me, chid me, dared

me, and I went and married him. We were coming straight here to tell you all what we had done; but he was drowned; and I thought I would say nothing about him: and I married you, David, for the sake of peace and quietness. I've tried to keep it from you, but have found I cannot. There—that's the substance of it, and you can never, never forgive me, I am sure!"

She spoke desperately. But the old man, instead of turning black or blue, or slaying her in his indignation, jumped up from his chair, and began to caper around the room in quite an ecstatic emotion.

"Oh, happy thing! How well it falls out!" he exclaimed, snapping his fingers over his head. "Ha-ha—the knot is cut—I see a way out of my trouble—ha-ha!"

She looked fixedly at him without uttering a sound, till, as he still continued smiling joyfully, she said, "Oh—what do you mean! Is it done to torment me?"

"No—no! Oh, mee deer, your story helps me out of the most heart-aching quandary a poor man ever found himself in! You see, it is this—I've got a secret, too; and unless you had had one to tell, I could never have seen my way to tell mine!"

"What is yours—what is it?" she asked, with altogether a new view of things.

"Well—it is a bouncer; mine is a bouncer!" said he, looking on the ground and wiping his eyes.

"Not worse than mine?"

"Well—that depends upon how you look at it. Yours had to do with the past alone; and I don't mind it. You see, we've been married a month, and it don't jar upon me as it would if we'd only been married a day or two. Now mine refers to past, present, and future; so that——"

"Past, present, and future!" she murmured. "It never occurred to me that you had a secret, too."

"But I have!" he said, shaking his head. "In fact, four."

"Then tell 'em!" cried the young woman.

"I will—I will. But be considerate, I beg ye, mee deer. Well—I wasn't a bachelor when I married 'ee, any more than you were a spinster. Just as you was a widow-woman, I was a widow-man.

"Ah!" said she, with some surprise. "But is that all?—then we are nicely balanced," she added, relieved.

"No—it is not all. There's the point. I am not only a widower."

"Oh, David!"

"I am a widower with three children—three strapping girls—the eldest taller than you. Don't ye look so struck—dumb-like! It fell out in this way. I knew the poor woman, their mother, in Penzance for some years; and—to cut a long story short—I privately married her at last, just before she died. I kept the matter secret, but it is getting known among the people here by degrees. I've long felt for the children—that it is my duty to have them here, and do something for them. I have not had courage to break it to ye, but I've seen lately that it would soon come to your ears, and that hev worried me."

"Are they educated?" said the ex-schoolmistress.

"No. I am sorry to say they have been much neglected; in truth, very much. And so I thought that by marrying a young schoolmistress I should teach 'em, and bring 'em into genteel condition, all for nothing. You see, they are growed up too tall to be sent to school."

"Oh, mercy!" she almost moaned. "Three great girls to teach the rudiments to, and have always in the house with me spelling over their books; and I hate teaching, it kills me. I am bitterly punished—I am, I am!"

"You'll get used to 'em, mee deer, and the balance of secrets—mine against yours—will comfort your heart with a sense of justice. I could send for 'em this week very well—and I will! In faith, I could send this very day. Baptista, you have relieved me of all my difficulty!"

Thus the interview ended, so far as this matter was concerned. Baptista was too stupefied to say more, and when she went away to her room she wept from very mortification at Mr. Heddegan's duplicity. Education, the one thing she abhorred; the shame of it to delude a young wife so!

The next meal came round. As they sat, Baptista would not suffer her eyes to turn towards him. He did not attempt to intrude upon her reserve, but every now and then looked under the table and chuckled with satisfaction at the aspect of affairs. "How very well matched we be!" he said, comfortably.

Next day, when the steamer came in, Baptista saw her husband rush down to meet it; and soon after there appeared at her door three tall, hipless, shoulderless girls, dwindling in height and size from the eldest to the youngest, like a row of Pan pipes; at the head of them standing Heddegan. He smiled pleasantly through the grey fringe of his whiskers and beard, and turning to the girls said, "Now come forrard, and shake hands properly with your stepmother."

Thus she made their acquaintance, and he went out, leaving them together. On examination the poor girls turned out to be not only plain-looking, which she could have forgiven, but to have such a lamentably meagre intellectual equipment as to be hopelessly inadequate as companions. Even the eldest, almost her own age, could only read with difficulty words of two syllables; and taste in dress was beyond their comprehension. In the long vista of future years she saw nothing but dreary drudgery at her detested old trade without prospect of reward.

She went about quite despairing during the next few days—an unpromising, unfortunate mood for a woman who had not been married six weeks. From her parents she concealed everything. They had been amongst the few acquaintances of Heddegan who knew nothing of his secret, and were indignant enough when they saw such a ready-made household foisted upon their only child. But she would not support them in their remonstrances. "No, you don't yet know all," she said.

Thus Baptista had sense enough to see the retributive fairness of this issue. For some time, whenever conversation arose between her and Heddegan, which was not often, she always said, "I am miserable, and you know it. Yet I don't wish things to be otherwise."

But one day when he asked, "How do you like 'em now?" her answer was unexpected. "Much better than I did," she said, quietly. "I may like them very much some day."

This was the beginning of a serener season for the chastened spirit of Baptista Heddegan. She had, in truth, discovered, underneath the crust of uncouthness and meagre articulation which was due to their Troglodytean existence, that her unwelcomed daughters had natures that were unselfish almost to sublimity. The harsh discipline accorded to their young lives before their mother's wrong had been righted, had operated less to crush them than to lift them above all personal ambition. They considered the world and its contents in a purely objective way, and their own lot seemed only to affect them as that of certain human beings among the rest, whose troubles they knew rather than suffered.

This was such an entirely new way of regarding life to a woman of Baptista's nature, that her attention, from being first arrested by it, became deeply interested. By imperceptible pulses her heart expanded in sympathy with theirs. The sentences of her tragi-comedy, her life, confused till now, became clearer daily. That in humanity, as exemplified by these girls, there was nothing to dislike, but infinitely much to pity, she learnt with the lapse of each week in their company. She grew to like the girls of unpromising exterior, and from liking she got to love them; till they formed an unexpected point of junction between her own and her husband's interests, generating a sterling friendship at least, between a pair in whose existence there had threatened to be neither friendship nor love.

THE END

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